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Allan Williams/William Marshall

THE MAN WHO GAVE THE BEATLES AWAY

The amazing true story of the Beatles' early years

King's Park

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THE MAN WHO GAVE THE BEATLES AWAY

Liverpool 1960

'Come on, lads,' I said, just for one number Mister Parnes would like to hear you without Stuart. He's just curious. You understand? Okay?' . . .

It was one of the worst moments of my life.

'Okay, boys?' I repeated when I got no answer.

'No, it's not okay.' The voice was Lennon's. Hard, flat, final and contemptuous. Like a steel fist. . . .

'Nothing, Al, not a song. Sorry, we can't do it,' said one of them.

'That's right, Al. Impossible.'

'No go.' . . .

Someone among the other groups strummed a few notes of 'Laura' and the tension was eased.

Lennon said, 'Allan, you know better than that. We're a group. All or none. Take us all or none. That's the way it is.

Big tough Lennon with a great big heart.

I felt like cheering. Their names in lights, a hundred quid a week each. Parnes to steer them through the treachery of show biz — all forsaken, hurled back. Balls to the world, to the bright lights, the money, the fame. God if you'd seen it in a corny Hollywood movie you wouldn't have believed it.

The Man Who Gave the Beatles Away

Allan Williams and
William Marshall

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FOR STUART AND RORY
WHO NEVER QUITE MADE IT.
BUT THEN, WHO DID?

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PREFACE

The grinding of teeth, the popping of sweat

In 1959, a storm was blowing up out of the mucky old streets of Liverpool, the town I love, which was to change the fortunes of thousands and the lifestyles of millions: the Liverpool Sound.

The Big Beat was then only a whimper echoing down the crumbling canyons of the tough old city on the banks of the big muddy Mersey. Only a handful of kids could have told you who the Beatles were. The pop idols then were people like Chubby Checker, Bo Diddley, Tommy Steele, Billy Fury, Bill Haley and the Comets. The sound of Frankie Laine, cracking his studio whip to the tune of 'Mule Train', was still heard throughout the Western world and Billy Daniels was still getting a lot of mileage from sticking his finger in his ear and crucifying a song called 'That Old Black Magic'.

In this short, hectic period, I was caught up in the first eddies of the growing storm of Beatlemania.

I was the Beatles' first manager. I still have their contracts, ragged and burnt from being involved in a fire — contracts dating from the time when you could have hired the Beatles for ten quid a night, and they'd have provided their own transport, and would have said a big thank you besides. Now, of course, they can and do turn down millions of dollars for appearances in the States.

I dropped the Beatles when they were on the very brink of becoming the biggest thing show business had ever seen. And if you think I lose a lot of sleep over this, you are on the right track — because, brother, I often wake in the night and stare at the wall, and I can feel my teeth grinding together. They make a gritty noise in my skull and the sweat starts to pop out on my brow, as I think of how I let the band and a million quid slip through my fingers.

I know I'm not the only sucker who didn't realise that the

Beatles were to become the biggest stars in show biz. There were plenty of others along the way who were offered the Beatles' early recording contracts and who said 'Thanks a lot, but no thanks'. So I'm in good, if not rich, company. I'm not the only guy who paces the floor at night wondering: 'Where did I go wrong? Why aren't the millions all mine?'

We can't all be right all the time. Shakespeare was never more accurate than when he said, in effect, you get one big opportunity in your lifetime and if you pass it up, you're a dead duck. And you'll curse your luck for the rest of your days.

But what the hell — I haven't done too badly up to now. Maybe these days I drink too much and insult a few too many of the right people — or the wrong people, depending on how you look at it. But time goes on, and I look around me for another bite at the Big apple.

Although, in my case, the apple could never be so big again.

ALLAN WILLIAMS

CHAPTER ONE

A tired but tolerant eye for me

I still live in Liverpool, my home town. There is, in my opinion, no place else quite like it, though I'm not the professional Liverpudlian who rams his home town down your throat like a stage Irishman.

The town has a tremendously vibrant, individual character and culture. It is in the county of Lancashire, an hour's drive down the main East Lancashire road from Manchester. Because of its reputation for wit, warmth and violence, the city is never considered to be part of the county of Lancashire – and, in fact, the people there never think of themselves as Lancastrians. They are from Liverpool. Scousers, Wackers, Liverpudlians. And always to a man, to a woman, fiercely proud of it.

Lime Street, the main street, is one of the best known thoroughfares in the world, immortalised and enshrined in the bawdy, rumbustious words of the song 'Maggie May'. The rude version sung by sailors round the world goes: 'Oh, my darling Maggie May, they have taken her away and she'll never walk down Lime Street any more. No more she'll rob the sailor or be fucked by many a whaler, Oh, she'll never walk down Lime Street any more.'

There were hundreds of Maggie Mays on Lime Street up to a few short years ago. You couldn't walk between the old Adelphi Hotel and the Washington Hotel, a couple of hundred yards away, without being solicited by a lady of pleasure. If you happened to meander off the street down any of the narrow alleys, you would most likely find one or more good time girls treating their customers to what is known as a 'kneetrembler' – a stand-up coupling, an uncomfortable union of lusting bodies.

However, the city fathers got tired of the incidence of VD, as well as the horror expressed by visitors to the fair town. The vice traffic was blatant and there were at least two pubs between

the Adelphi and the 'Wash' whose female clientele was entirely made up of whores. Lime Street lost a lot of character when the clean-up campaign cleared the girls off the streets, and now it is a ghost of its former self. In fact, that applies to Liverpool as a whole.

As in many other big cities, the centre of Liverpool has lost a lot of its old vitality through redevelopment, and it has acquired hardening of the arteries from the surfeit of cement in its veins. But I feel safe in Liverpool. Whenever I'm away from it I experience a feeling of insecurity and yearn to be back, even if I've only been gone for a day.

I'm well known in the city, in the bars and pubs and clubs. Whenever I drink too much, which is not infrequently, there are plenty of friends who'll look after me. Even the police — some of the good ones — look upon my high spirits with a kindly and tolerant eye. A slightly tired eye. But tolerant.

CHAPTER TWO

A beaver in the white slave trade

I'm not out to hand you a hard luck story. There is nothing more boring than bending someone's ear with what might have been, if only, if only . . .

If. What an awful word. When anyone sets out to tell me something and begins with the word 'if', it's a terrible temptation to switch off right away.

Let's start at the beginning of my quite jolly tale.

I didn't get much of a formal education. I often wish I had. Plumbing seemed a steady enough job, and that's what I drifted into. But I had ambition and I soon drifted out of it. I was a door-to-door book salesman and then went on to flogging refrigerators and electric typewriters. I have a certain brash, cocky way with me, when I feel like turning it on, so I made a reasonable living.

Looking back, I must have had a hell of a brass face. When my line was fridges, I would bowl into a tiny corner shop run by some old woman with hardly a couple of pennies to rub together. I'd chat the old dear up about what sort of ice-cream she was selling, and maybe buy a cornet for a couple of pennies. Before she knew what had happened, the poor woman would be signing on the dotted line for a fridge that would keep a Cunard liner in ice for a year.

You gotta live. You gotta hustle for a buck.

Like now, for instance. I'm stripping the furnishing from derelict churches in Liverpool, and making quite a good living selling off the stained-glass windows and floor tiles and wooden pews. The other day I was balanced on a narrow plank a hundred feet up in a church, trying to prise out some stained-glass windows. I happened to look down at the hard stone-cold floor far below. For a moment I thought I was going to fall and I wondered what sort of mess I would make down there. Christ, I

thought appropriately. Greed, greed. What a way to make a living.

But back to my selling days. I met a bloke at a Malayan Independence Ball and he told me he was involved in the jewellery business. Nothing expensive, he explained, but the profit was very good. It turned out to be handmade junk, the sort of thing the trendies go mad for these days. He said he needed a salesman in London, where his operation was centred, and that I would make good money working for him.

This guy had rented a poky little cellar in a house in Queensway and employed half a dozen starved-looking Indians who turned out the jewellery, working like beavers from dawn to dusk. Instead of selling the stuff, I was put on to making it along with the coloured labour. This guy wanted me as a sort of white slave. These Indians couldn't speak a word of English, but they were nice people, and during our breaks we sat around eating with our fingers from an enormous pot of curry. It was the sort of crazy situation you get yourself into when you're looking around for opportunities, waiting for the one big break.

After a while I got tired of being exploited by my black boss and decided to move on to fatter pastures. For a while I hitch-hiked around Europe, sleeping rough and eating in student cafés. Those were pleasant carefree days and, as one is when young, I was sure that some day something very, very good was going to happen to me.

When I got back to England, I kicked around Liverpool 8 — the Bohemian area that had once been the home of rich cotton merchants, shipowners and slave traders — and thought for a time that I would like to go to the Far East. Why the Far East, I don't know. It seemed very attractive at the time. But instead, I heard that an old watch-repairer in Slater Street off Bold Street had gone bust and his premises were up for rent.

I hardly had a bean to my name, but I tapped relatives for a quid here and a quid there and managed to raise just under a hundred pounds. With this tiny capital and a little handyman help from my friends, I turned the place into a coffee bar which I called the Jacaranda — the Jac, as it came to be known. Artists, musicians, pimps, beggars, ordinary layabouts and all the rag tag-and-bobtail of Liverpool 8 soon made it their headquarters. Our speciality was bacon sandwiches.

Liverpool was hard hit by unemployment and a lot of the young people went straight from school and on to the dole. The dole became a way of life and they lazed their days away in the Jac. They were in no hurry to join the rat race.

The basement was converted into a tiny dance floor, but how people danced I'll never know, because the floor was rough-hewn brick. It was tough enough to walk on it, let alone dance. I put on a West Indian steel band, which was quite a novelty in those days, and the whole scene was like the Black Hole of Calcutta set to music. But the people liked it. The place was jam-packed every night, couples necking and dancing and drinking Coke. It was unlicensed, but people brought in liquor and spiked their soft drinks. For a while I didn't realise what was going on, but when I saw boys and girls staggering out of the place it dawned on me that they couldn't get that way on Coke alone.

The ground floor had benches around the walls and narrow tables where people would sit and drink their coffee and eat their bacon butties or toast. There was a camaraderie about the place. Everyone knew everyone else, more or less, if only by sight. We closed when the last nightbird began to nod over his coffee or Coke. Dawn was often pearling the sky when I put up the shutters.

It was in the Jac that I first caught sight of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Stuart Sutcliffe in the late 1950s. Stuart was the 'Fifth Beatle', who died so tragically at the age of twenty-one.

John Lennon, ever the leader, was the central figure of a group of layabouts and dreamers — the advance guard of the hippy movement — who occupied flats in Percy Street and Gambia Terrace. These flats had no furniture because they burnt the tables and chairs in the middle of the floor when the weather grew cold. (This was a favourite trick of Modigliani's, so I suppose the lads thought it was quite the Bohemian thing to do.) The flats were packed with junk — pedestrian crossing lights, tea chests, road signs, heaps of ragged clothing. From somewhere they had filched a coffin, which John slept in, its silken lining providing a very comfortable resting place. John's sense of humour was quite macabre in those days.

Liverpool was full of characters, of course, and the Beatles

were only a few of the many. One of my favourites was Arthur Dooley, the city's famous sculptor, whose abode was even more unusual than John's. Since he was (and still is) an artist who works in metal, he didn't hang pictures on the walls — he hammered in rolls of barbed wire instead. It was almost impossible to move around his room because of the half-finished figures and lumps of metal.

Arthur's rented room was next door to the Jac, and often, after closing down for the night, I and some friends would drift next door and shake him awake. This could be hazardous, for Arthur — who is six feet four and heavy with it — would often be sleeping off the effects of a hard night. Also, in the winter, he usually went to sleep fully clothed, because there wasn't much heating in the place. It could be quite hilarious to walk in, shake him awake, and watch this great hulking figure dressed in overalls, an Army greatcoat and a woolly hat sit up among the bedclothes. Fortunately, he usually made us welcome, and we would drink beer and wine until the sun came up.

The Beatles hung around the Jac, feeling privileged to sit near such successful Liverpool groups as Rory Storm and the Hurricanes and Derry Wilkie and the Seniors. John, Paul, George and Stuart had got together as a group, and because John and Stuart were students at the city Art College, they managed to get engagements at the dances there for a few bob a man. It was a bloody awful sound they produced, not helped by the fact that Stuart, on bass guitar, could hardly produce a single musical note. He was truly awful, and never claimed to be a musician. The rest of the boys covered up for him.

The groups that patronised the Jac represented the really big time to the Beatles. They idolised them and didn't dare speak unless spoken to first.

I thought the Beatles were a right load of layabouts. I wasn't the only one. It was true that they were different; they had strong personalities, somehow compelling, and they were oddly impressive in a way hard to define. But layabouts, I thought, simply four more lost-looking faces in the Bohemian crowd that drifted in and out of the place. There seems to be something about my personality that attracts the losers and fringe people of the world, and the Beatles just seemed to be part of the crowd.

During the day Jac looked a crummy place, almost squalid, like a stale, tired waiting room in a railway station. There was a timeless feeling of vacuum. People would sit around for hours, exchanging no more than a nod or a muttered word, while looking out into Slater Street. Maybe one of them would see a friend passing by, and jump up and run out to cadge the price of a buttie or a Coke. It was only at night, when the West Indian band arrived, that the place began to jump.

In 1959 the papers were full of the Chelsea Arts Ball, and I decided to run a similar venture in Liverpool. I hired St. George's Hall in the centre of town and asked Stuart Sutcliffe and John Lennon to make some floats, which would be smashed up at midnight, according to tradition. George and Paul were roped in as well. I said I would give them a lump sum of fifteen quid and free tickets to the ball.

The floats were spectacular. They proved that the Beatles had discerning eyes for line and colour. (Stuart, of course, was a true artist; if he had not died so young, a brilliant career as a painter would have been ahead of him. He managed once to get an exhibit in a John Moores Exhibition, which was subsequently bought by the multi-millionaire for his own collection.) John and Stuart were the driving forces behind the building of the floats, and with George and Paul lending their hands, the group produced some superb pieces. The float that stands out most vividly in my mind was in the shape of a huge guitar, the symbol of their future fame.

The ball, at the St. George's Hall opposite the old Empire Theatre on Lime Street, was a runaway success. Several hundred tickets were sold. People were offering black-market prices for tickets. One man rang me and said he would give me a week's free beer in his pub — as much as I could drink — if I got him a couple of tickets. I couldn't oblige him. Every ticket was gone and the city council didn't like overcrowding at their beloved, ancient, much-prized St. George's Hall.

During the day, the building is used as a High Court of Justice, and many of Liverpool's major criminals remember it with fear and dread. The main hall, where we were to hold the event, boasts one of the biggest and most famous organs in the world. It is one of the jewels in the crown of the city. Most of the

leading organists of the world have played their masterpieces at the gigantic keyboard of this truly magnificent instrument.

We planned to have a Prettiest Nurse competition, and had contenders from all the city hospitals. Stage and TV star Bruce Forsyth was going to be the judge. I had laid on a VIP bar where my top guests could look down at the ballroom and watch the fun and games. The scene was set for glory.

On the day of the ball, hours before we threw open the door to the ticket holders, the Beatles and I manhandled the bits and pieces of the floats into the main ballroom. Then John, George, Paul and Stuart fitted them together. We had to do it this way because the floats were so big we couldn't have got them in through the doors.

We stood back and admired the results.

'Bloody marvellous, boys. I think you would have made better stage designers than musicians. Not too late to change, you know.'

'I wouldn't mind that, Allan,' said Stuart, the true artist among them.

'Here, Al, they're so bloody good,' said Paul, 'you ought to pay us a bit extra — no?'

'No,' I said. I'm not mean, you understand. Just careful with the pennies. It's the pounds that always seem to run away from me. I'm rather cheese-paring with the smaller finances, but often quite wild with large amounts of cash. We all have our idiosyncrasies, do we not?

The ball was a riot. They nearly wrecked the fine old place. After it was all over, the city fathers said that there would be no more arts balls. Not at their St. George's Hall, ever again. No sir.

The bars did a roaring trade. There were drunks tottering and falling over in every corner. When the time came for the floats to be broken up in the traditional way, the people went mad. In the middle of all the destruction I saw the Beatles prancing about, having fun. They had come dressed as Pierrots and their girl friends were in grass skirts, making out they were hula hula girls from the South Seas.

Later I saw Paul in the bar, and over a beer I asked him if he was having a good night.

'Yeah, Al, but I don't think Stuart is. He's a bit upset.'

'Yeah — what about? What's up with old Stu?'

'It was the floats. He didn't like it — all that business.'

'All what business?'

'Breaking them,' said Paul. 'The way everyone went mad and broke the floats up.'

'But it's traditional at an arts ball. That's what it's all about. It's symbolic of an arts ball. It wouldn't be an arts ball without it.'

'Yeah — I know that. You know that. But Stuart still didn't like it. Made him very sad,' he said.

'Christ,' I said, gulping at my beer. 'You just can't win.'

'Well, just thought I'd tell you in case you see him with a long face tonight. You'll know why.'

'Yeah, thanks, Paul. Poor old Stuart.' I watched Paul dive back into the mêlée looking for his girl friend, a scream in his Pierrot's suit. A Beatle Picasso picture. Then I looked for Stuart, hoping to cheer him up. He was nowhere around, so I decided to go out for a breath of fresh air before the big event — the choosing of the Prettiest Nurse.

There was a big new moon out that night as I walked round the block. You could smell the dirt and mud from the Mersey. The tea stall parked in the middle of Lime Street car park was doing a big trade with the late-night crowd. A crowd of Norwegian sailors, maybe from one of the whalers, staggered past, swigging at bottles of booze. Over in the doorway of the old Liverpool Press Club there was a coming and going of cars and people. Now there was a place where good times were had by all. Talk about swingers — those Press boys sure knew how to have a good time.

As I walked back to the main door I saw a figure in a Pierrot suit, alone, forlorn. It was Stuart, standing by one of the ornamental light standards on the huge plateau in front of the hall.

'Hi, Stuart,' I said. 'All alone? Why aren't you inside, whooping it up with the rest of the lads?'

'Thought I'd come out for a bit,' said Stuart.

'Nothing wrong, is there?' I could see his sad, thin face in the moonlight. Even his Pierrot suit seemed to droop with depression.

'Well, you know how it is, Allan. Those floats. We worked so hard on them. The boys and me. And then they were all busted

up as though they didn't mean a bloody thing. I can't understand people.'

I put my hand on his shoulder. You could hear the sound of the music wafting out of the main door of the hall. Giggles and screams came from a nearby shop doorway.

'What do you mean, Stuart? You know they had to finish up like that.'

'Yeah,' said Stuart. 'It's the bloody awful animal thing in people. The urge to destroy. Suddenly in there I didn't like people any more. I was frightened of them, in a mob. They were all together like a huge, hideous animal, tearing and rending.'

Poor old Stuart. So sensitive. So vulnerable. So soon to die.

'I don't think there's anything we can do about it, Stuart. People aren't all bad. A bit uncontrolled now and then. There's this dark streak in all of us. The good ones control the dark side of themselves. This way our society works. You've got to believe that the goodies will always prevail, Stuart. Otherwise you'll drive yourself round the bend. Come on, cheer up.'

I know it reads like a lot of shit now, but it sounded right at the time.

Stuart visibly brightened. 'You're right, I suppose, Allan. I think I should get to know the real people better.'

He constantly referred to getting to know 'the real people' at that period in his young life.

'What is it you want, Stuart? Out of life, I mean?'

'I want to paint the sort of pictures that will show the world its own face, make it see its own soul. Make the people see themselves as they are, happy and sad, vicious and noble, mean and generous and doomed. Doomed from the start.'

In the moonlight I could see the tears rolling down his cheeks. I put my hand on his arm.

'Ah, come on, Stu, let's go back in. You don't want to let things get through to you too much. You have to learn to cover up. Don't be so fucking vulnerable.'

But that's the way Stuart had to be. He was an artist. He suffered with and for the people.

We went back into the ball and I lost sight of him. The Prettiest Nurse contest was announced. The girls paraded on the stage. They were gorgeous.

Then all hell let loose.

There were a lot of Liverpool University students at the ball, and in a mob they are the wildest things outside London Zoo. They had smuggled in dozens of bags of flour, and in a second the hall was filled with flying flour bags. The students were upstairs in the gallery, and from this position they could bombard the revellers at will.

The scene was utter chaos. People were dashing hither and thither to escape the barrage. The floor was soon covered with an inch of the white stuff. In the middle of it all I heard the ponderous tones of the mighty organ. A drunk was playing rock'n'roll on Liverpool Corporation's most treasured possession — their mighty world-famous organ. I despatched a bouncer to drag him off, and as I did so, I saw another drunk staggering about with a fire extinguisher. The thing started to emit a jet of foam which the drunk aimed at the crowd down below.

There were screams as the first large white dollops of foam hit the people. I snatched the extinguisher from the guy's hands and ran with it to the nearest lavatory. I pushed the nozzle down the loo pan and watched the toilet become slowly buried in a mountain of oozing whiteness. Very surreal.

Meanwhile, back in the main ballroom, the scene was popping. I dashed upstairs to the VIP bar where Bruce Forsyth was having a beer with a few of his stage friends.

At midnight there was supposed to be a shower of balloons from the ceiling on to the dancers and revellers below. And it was nearly midnight. I looked down on all the people covered in flour, some of them enjoying the bombardment, some not. I could see the Beatles in the thick of it with their girl friends. The Pierrots and the Hawaiian girls. All kids having a great time.

The balloons, which were to come floating down in a multicoloured shower to bounce gently on the heads of the people, were secured to the ceiling with huge nets which were used behind football goalposts, to keep the ball from flying into the crowds. I had borrowed the nets, and very effective they were too.

I could see the hundreds of balloons, which we had taken hours to inflate, hard up against the ceiling. I could also see my

man standing not far away. He was supposed to cut two corners of the nets when I gave the signal on the stroke of midnight. My watch hand was coming round to the hour of twelve so I shouted, 'Okay, let the balloons go. Cut the ropes and let the things go.'

This guy in charge of the balloons produced a great big butcher's knife and sawed away at the ropes at the corners of the football nets.

Bruce Forsyth, standing by my side, said, 'That's going to be very effective, Allan. Well done, lad.'

'Yeah — I hope so, Brucie.'

The guy cut the two corners of the ropes and the balloons, much to my relief, bobbed down to the excited dancers. It was a nice relaxing sight in a hectic night.

'Very good, Allan. Very good. Beautiful,' said Bruce. 'Look at that, folks,' he said, turning to his friends.

'Lovely,' they said.

At that very moment, I spotted my man walking round the gallery to the other side of the hall. He still had the knife in his hand. The huge football nets were hanging over the heads of the people below.

In a flash I realised what the guy was up to. He was going to cut the rest of the ropes and let the nets go flying down into the hall. Somebody could be badly hurt. I could be in jail, sued for every penny I didn't have. Disaster.

'Stop,' I yelled. 'Hey, you there with the knife. For fuck's sake don't do it. Pleeeeese stop!'

This four-letter guy simply waved at me, calmly leaned out over the balcony and sawed through one of the ropes. I was too late. By the time I got round there he had cut all the ropes. The nets were hurtling down.

Dozens of the dancers were enmeshed, like those gladiators you see in movies of the Roman games. There were screams of panic. The university students, seizing their chance, grabbed the nets and started bouncing people up and down in them. The bloke who had done all the damage had disappeared. I went back to the VIP bar.

Bruce Forsyth was standing there with that familiar lean jaw of his literally hanging open. He couldn't believe his eyes.

'Allan, boy, I've never seen anything like it in my life. This is

a truly amazing business. Somebody is going to get badly hurt if you don't do something fast.'

What could I do? One little guy (I'm five feet nothing) against all those great beefy students. And the commissionaires were all elderly guys. Nevertheless, I rounded them up and sent them in as shock troops. Very old grey-haired shock troops.

Give them their due. They had a go. For all of one minute it looked like they could restore law and order in there. Then one of the rugger types among the students, obviously the ring-leader for the night's mayhem, yelled, 'Okay, boys, get the old guys into the nets. Let's send 'em sky high.'

So they bundled these poor old guys with their war ribbons and uniforms into the football nets and, chanting 'one-two-three', sent them, peaked caps, war medals, blue serge, white whiskers and everything, shooting up to the ceiling. Then when they looked all in, the students rolled the poor old buggers out on to the floor. How somebody was not killed I will never know.

That wasn't all. Don't go away, folks, the tale gets better. Someone — some nice bastard — went down to the basement and turned on all the water taps.

We had to evacuate the place. A good time was had by all. They still talk about it in Liverpool, in some slightly ageing circles where grey-haired swingers gather.

The Liverpool Council raised their hands in horror and said oh dear oh dear oh dear. Rock'n'roll on our mighty organ? Flour bags? Old commissionaires tossed in nets? Fire extinguishers fired into the loo?

No more arts balls, they said. Not ever.

My main memory of the night, though, is of Stuart unburdening his soul to me. I remember the tears on his cheeks in the moonlight. The lost look about him. The way he wanted to communicate with 'the people'.

Dear dead days. Gone, all gone.

CHAPTER THREE

Beatles sit out the birth of an era

John and Stuart had a very precarious time at the Art College. Trouble seemed to be their middle name. If not their first and last. Nothing serious — there was nothing evil about them — but their art grants were often in jeopardy because of their high jinks and waywardness. Their hippy lifestyle got into the Sunday newspapers and made quite a splash, and that didn't help with the powers that be. There was also a story going round that the Beatles had been using stolen amplifiers for their instruments. This was not the case. Thieves they were certainly not.

The arts ball had created quite a stir in the city. The Beatles and some of the other groups who came to the Jac reacted as though they'd had a shot of adrenalin. George Harrison said to me one night, 'It was great, Al, but it wasn't our kind of music. You've got to get us moving, Al.'

'Okay, George, I'll do my best, but you blokes have a long-way to go. You gotta practise more. Keep at it.'

'We will,' George promised. 'We will, Al. You get things organised for us, that's all.'

It was then that the idea of a Beat concert took form in my mind, and to get the feel of this sort of thing I went along to the Liverpool Empire to watch a show with Eddie Cochrane and Gene Vincent topping the bill.

The atmosphere was sensational, the kids screaming and writhing in their seats, the girls playing with themselves when the lights were down. I was swamped by the animal feeling of it all and I could smell money. Lots of it.

Larry Parnes was the big impresario, so I booked a whole show from him with the bill topped by Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochrane. I hired the Liverpool Boxing Stadium, which holds about six thousand people. My first big promotion was about to

happen and I was trembling with excitement. All the arrangements were going along fine, the tickets were selling well and I felt that in no time I might be right up there with the big boys in the entertainment world.

A couple of days before the show was due to go on I switched on the radio just in time to get an earful of a news flash that the famous rock'n'roll singers Eddie Cochrane and Gene Vincent had been involved in a car accident. Cochrane had been killed and Vincent injured. Apart from feeling sorry for the rock stars, my immediate reaction was anxiety about my show. One half of the star billing had been wiped out on my very first big production.

I put in a quick call to Larry Parnes in London and he said things weren't too bad. Gene Vincent was hurt but he would be able to go on. Even so, Larry advised me to cancel the show because the fans might get nasty over Eddie Cochrane not being there as advertised. Death was no excuse for the tough Liverpool kids, it would seem.

Poor Eddie's death was instrumental in my putting on the Liverpool groups *en masse* for the first time. To help pad out the evening I booked Gerry and the Pacemakers, Bob Evans and his Five Pennies, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Derry Wilkie and the Seniors and a singing group who featured a midget. I can't remember the name of this last group but I do remember their act, because the midget had to come in at the right time with 'bee-bop-a-loo-bop'. When it came to his bit, the midget leaped into the air, aiming for the mike, and I swear he was propelled into action by someone sticking their finger up his bum, on cue.

The Beatles came along as customers. I didn't think they were good enough to be on the bill.

The night was a complete rave from the start. The ushers — big beefy men used to the boxing crowds — got the kids seated, and then, as usual, went off to the famous boxing pub, the Cross Keys, in the next street. That was when the pandemonium started. Soon the boys and girls were ripping up the seats and storming the stage. When Gene Vincent went on, the excitement reached a climax.

As the kids tried to scramble on stage to get at Gene, Larry Parnes and I ran round the boxing ring stamping on their

fingers. The members of the Liverpool groups were all tough nuts and they managed to get Gene on and off stage in one piece. But it was a near thing and Larry Parnes was panting and puffing, 'Never again, never again.'

At one time that evening I thought the kids were going to take the stadium apart. The man who saved the day and took a lot of the heat out of the situation was Rory Storm. Rory, who had a very bad stammer which miraculously disappeared when he sang, jumped up on the stage when the riot was at its height and screamed at the kids, 'S-s-s s-s . . .' The kids were spellbound. Then screamed at the kids, 'S-s-s-s-stop it. You k-k-k-ids.'

And for some reason they quietened down. Rory was a tall blond boy with a great stage personality who could dominate a crowd. He was another musician who was to die tragically young.

Looking back now I often think of that night with the Beatles there in the audience. How did they feel? Were they screaming and ripping up the place too? Did they have any inkling that in a very short time this sort of scene would fade into insignificance compared with their world acclaim?

After the show we all adjourned to the Jac for Coke and butties. I felt that I had indeed discovered my niche in life. This was what I wanted to do, promote bigger and better shows featuring Liverpool groups. The local groups had held the crowd spellbound. They had something new, something fresh, which got a strange, savage, elemental response from the audience. I could see me becoming at least as big as Larry Parnes.

Larry and I were discussing the future for concerts in Liverpool, and while we talked I saw the Beatles sitting in a dark corner, straining their ears to overhear the conversation.

Parnes had had his eyes opened wide by the response to the music played by my Liverpool groups and, great showman that he was, he grasped the fact that they had great potential. He said he might be able to use some of the local groups to back his stars on tour, people like Duffy Power and Johnny Gentle.

These two stars had tours of Scotland lined up and I knew Parnes was having difficulties getting London musicians to go up there. Their objections were on purely financial grounds. Parnes simply did not pay enough for the Londoners to travel in

the style to which they were accustomed. But my boys weren't used to any style at all. They lived rough.

A couple of days later the Beatles came into the Jac and ordered their usual — coffee and toast, without jam. They were broke. John sidled over to me as I stood at the doorway to the kitchen where my staff prepared the food and dispensed the coffee and Cokes. Wreathed in steam gushing from the doorway, he said in his thick Liverpool accent, 'Hey there, Al, why don't you do something for us?'

He looked awfully scruffy. A right bloody layabout, I thought.

'Do what?' I responded, fully remembering the evening when the Beatles had been breaking their necks to listen in to the conversation between Parnes and me. I didn't think at that time they were intent on becoming a full-time professional group. As far as I knew, music was only their hobby for making a bit of pocket money.

'You know, don't fuck about,' said John. 'You and Parnes were talking the other night about using groups. How about us?'

This led to a very funny conversation, which went something like this.

'What about you?' said I.

Lennon started talking about the instruments they played and how they were developing. I knew they didn't have a drummer.

'Just a minute,' I said. 'Who's your fucking drummer? You've missed out the fucking drummer, you gotta have a fucking drummer.'

'Yeah,' said John, dragging in embarrassment at his bedraggled fag. 'We haven't fucking got one. You're right. No fucking drummer.'

So just to push him a bit more I went on, 'How do you expect to have any decent fucking sound without a fucking drummer? You'd better fucking get one before you come talking to me about doing things for you.'

'We can get by without one at a pinch,' said John, grinning that wolf smile of his. 'It's not really necessary, is it? A drummer?'

I couldn't believe my ears.

'You can't come here talking about having a group without a drummer, John. It just won't work. You haven't a proper band, a real sound.'

'Oh, Christ,' said John. 'I don't know any fucking drummers.'

In Liverpool among certain strata of the hoi polloi the trick was to insert as many obscenities into your dialogue as possible. Some of the more spectacular types even split words wide open so they could stuff them with swear words. For example: 'You gotta be-fucking-lieve me', and 'don't mess me a-fucking-bout'.

Really colourful stuff.

I told John I would see what I could do about a drummer. The boys had done me a good turn over the arts ball floats and they were, under their beat exteriors, nice lads.

John went away and sat down with the rest of the Beatles and they got their heads together. They always had their heads together, the Beatles. They were very close, presenting a solid wall to outsiders they didn't like.

At that moment in walked a guy called Cass who had a group called Cass and the Casanovas.

I said, 'Come over here, Cass, I want to introduce you to some pals of mine — the Beatles.'

I dragged him over to the Beatles and he said, 'The who?'

'The Beatles,' I said. 'Boys, this is Cass of the Casanovas. Cass, they need a drummer really bad. Can you help?'

As it turned out, Cass did get the Beatles a drummer — Tommy Moore, a labourer at Garston Bottle Works on the outskirts of Liverpool. The Beatles were teenagers when Tommy came into their lives. Tommy was twenty-five, so he must have seemed like an old man to them. But he was brilliant. (The other day George Harrison said in front of me and Ringo, who obviously didn't like it, 'Tommy Moore was the best fucking drummer we ever had at any time.' He was looking straight at the embarrassed Ringo when he said it.)

Now that they had Tommy, the Beatles were in with a chance as far as I was concerned. In late 1959, I started getting them their first real professional engagements. They did a lot of their rehearsing in the Jacaranda basement during the day, when it was deserted. Now and then they broke off to come up to the ground floor for a cup of tea and to say to me, 'How are we doing, Al?'

'Fucking awful,' I'd say, having a good laugh at their downcast faces. 'Fucking awful.'

They were doing a lot of Chuck Berry numbers and things like 'Roll Over Beethoven', one of their long-time favourites. The sound blasting up the stairs disturbed the drowsy dole-drawing layabouts who were my daytime regulars.

'What a fucking awful row!' they would groan. 'Is someone getting murdered down there?'

The 'fucking awful row' began to improve until the gang at the Jac ceased making their derogatory remarks. You could detect a day-to-day improvement. There came a time when I began to develop a definite gut reaction to the music — the powerful Beatles sound that was so soon to sweep the world was emerging, fast.

They sat around between rehearsals cadging toasted sandwiches from me and my staff. 'Hey, Al, how about coffee and butties till times get better?' Their faces glistening with the sweat and heat of the basement, where there was no ventilation and the walls were usually dripping with condensation, I couldn't refuse their demands for sustenance. Christ, they were just kids, starved rats, always hungry and puffing on the bedraggled remains of their ciggies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gonna kiss the Beatles' bum

How much better times were to get was beyond anyone's belief at that stage in the game. The first date I got the Beatles was at the Grosvenor Ballroom in Seacombe on the Wirral side of the Mersey. Don't let that swanky word 'ballroom' fool you. There were no chandeliers and sequins. It was a rough-tough dance hall with a reputation for nightly brawls and bloody battles between the teenage gangs who frequented the place.

Before they went out on this date, Cass said he didn't like their name. He told them. 'You ought to call yourselves the Silver Beatles. John Lennon, Long John Silver. Get it?'

The boys were too much in awe of Cass to refuse, and for a while they went under the name of the Silver Beatles. They used this name for about two months and then reverted to simply the Beatles.

'A fucking awful name that,' Cass told them, pulling a face.

They were driven to their first engagement in a van belonging to one of my bouncers. They paid him a quid and he helped them to load their instruments and they were off.

As I waved them away from the Jacaranda, I promised them a free cup of coffee on the house if they did well. The bouncer delivered the lads, stayed a while to hear them play and then came back to bounce for me at the Jac. I asked him how they had gone down.

'Fucking great,' he told me. 'Fucking marvellous.'

The Beatles had done so well, in fact, that the teenage thugs were too enthralled, by their music and personalities, to brawl.

Many of the groups at that time directed their playing and personal appeal to the girls, which was often the cause of fights breaking out. Rory Storm, for instance, made such a big impact

on the girls that the boys responded by picking fights among themselves to draw attention away from the group. Teenage *machismo*. The Merseysiders have this Latin streak.

But the Beatles' music and physical magnetism appealed to both sexes, it seemed. This, no doubt, was the foundation stone of their greatness.

For their first professional gig the Beatles got ten quid. Out of this they paid me one pound commission and one to the bouncer. That left eight pounds among the five of them. In the money of those days it worked out at thirty-two shillings each. Today, it would be 160 pence — about enough for a seat in the movies in London's West End. They couldn't believe their luck. They were in real show business at last.

When they came back from the Grosvenor Ballroom they sat in the Jac and I gave them coffee all round — as promised, on the house. They were beaming with the pleasure of it all and spent a long time sharing out their first real fee, counting the pennies among the breadcrumbs and coffee cups at their table. That night they all had toast with jam. They could afford it now. Since those days they have always had jam on their toast.

They had been such a great success at the Grosvenor that the promoter, a man called Dodd, booked them for a dance at Neston, a small town over in the Wirral. If the Grosvenor had a reputation for violence, this place at Neston was a battlefield by comparison. Despite the Beatles' music and personalities, a fight broke out and a boy was booted so badly he died the following day. The fight stopped the dance, and when the lads got back to the Jac that night they were white-faced and shaking at the savagery they had witnessed. They were tough lads, but even they had been upset by the spectacle of a boy being so brutally attacked. The boy who died was only sixteen.

I got the Beatles regular gigs around Merseyside at the small dance halls, and when they weren't travelling about, they spent all their time at the Jac. When my West Indian steel band had a night off, they took over and provided the music for dancing. They liked the sessions at the Jac because none of the crowd minded if they took the opportunity to try out new numbers. The dancers would shout out encouragement as they danced past, or if they didn't like the music, they'd make it plain with remarks like 'Put a sock in it' and 'Jesus Christ, what a racket!'

In a very short time the same people would have kissed a Beatle's bum for a mere 'Hello there, wack'.

The Beatles didn't have classy equipment in those days, and among the items they struggled along without were microphone stands.

One night George Harrison came up from the basement to see me as I was standing on the door welcoming customers and turning away troublemakers. I was chatting up the customers and giving everyone but the real bums a big hello when George said to me, 'Listen, Al, do you have any mops or brushes and things on the premises?'

'Sure, George,' I said. 'But, Jesus Christ, you haven't stooped to washing floors now, have you? You're not that broke.'

'No, no, Al, nothing like that,' said George, smiling that close-to-the-chest secret smile he still has.

I was vastly intrigued. 'Well come on, George, what the hell do you want stuff like that for? I'm interested in your music, not your mopping the place up.'

'No, no, it's nothing like that,' answered George. 'Where do you keep the stuff, Al?' he pleaded.

So, knowing that George wasn't going to give me a clue about his odd request, I took him to the passageway which led to the back yard.

'There you are,' I said, and opened the door to the little cubbyhole where the cleaners kept their gear.

George's eyes lit up when he saw the mops and brushes with their long handles.

'That's great, Al. That's just what we need. You're a pal.'

George groped about in the dank storage place and helped himself to a mop with a big soggy woollen head and two yard brushes — the heavy-duty sort with long stiff bristles.

'You're a funny guy, George,' I said, ribbing him gently. But he still wouldn't say why he wanted the cleaning gear.

I kicked the cubbyhole door shut and George went off to the basement stairway, the brushes rattling against the walls as he moved.

'Make sure you do a good job of those floors, you Beatles,' I shouted after his skinny retreating back.

George turned just as he was about to plunge down the narrow stairway. 'It's washday at the Jac,' he called back.

Funny guys, I thought.

When things at the door became a little less hectic I went down to the basement to see what was going on. You could hardly see across the room for the cigarette smoke. Now and then there was a strong whiff of the very distinctive smell of marijuana. My West Indian boys in the steel band were partial to the stuff, and as long as they didn't pass it round I made no fuss. Lots of people in Liverpool were on the stuff for years before it became trendy.

The Beatles' music was bouncing off the walls, and in the gloom couples were cavorting around or smooching. Everyone was having a good time. The Beatles were playing a driving rock number. Then I saw why they had wanted the mops and brooms.

Three gorgeous young girls were squatting at the Beatles' feet clutching the brushes and mop. The band, having no mike stands, had improvised by lashing their mikes to the broom handles. Then they had conned the girls into holding them up in front of their mouths and instruments. It was a weird sight and the crowd in the basement were having a laugh about it.

I shouted, 'Don't forget to mop up afterwards, lads.' They waved and grinned and rocked on. The girls who sat there for hours that night were among the first Beatlemaniacs. No doubt they now boast they once held a mike on a broomstick for the Beatles.

This broomstick arrangement became a regular thing for the Beatles, and such was their charisma even then that some of the regular girls at the Jac got into fights for the honour of holding the mikes. I saw two perfectly super-looking girls fight each other with fingernails and feet over who would get to hold the broom.

At that time I had the only Beat Cellar going in Liverpool. The Cavern was then a traditional jazz place run by Ray McFall, a thin, sandy-haired guy with a very dry humour he would hand out in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper. The only Beat group to go on at the Cavern was Rory Storm and the Hurricanes. Now, Rory and his boys could produce a type of jazz — if you weren't too fussy — but when the urge became too strong, they broke into good old rock'n'roll. This

always resulted in Ray's getting furious and stopping a couple of bob out of their pay by way of a fine.

Beat was a dirty word in many places and the rash of Beat cellars that was to spring up around the Dale Street area was still undreamed of.

CHAPTER FIVE

Showin' a profit in the ladies

The ladies' loo at the Jac was on the first floor. We had nothing for gents, just the back yard, where the customers did what they had to do by the light of the moon.

Then one day the public health authorities came round on an inspection visit. They didn't seem to care about the fact that there was nothing for gents, but they did take exception to the primitive state of the ladies' loo.

The walls of this establishment were often covered with graffiti and carried remarks about the size of the organs and the sexual performances of some of the lads in the groups, including the Beatles. The girls were very frank and specific and gave some shockingly intimate details about their favourite boy friends and their appendages. Typical comments, often in lipstick, were 'Joe Soap has the biggest cock in Liverpool' and 'Jimmy So-and-so keeps going all night'. I remember going into the ladies' loo one night after the Jac was closed and finding a drawing in lipstick of a gigantic penis. Underneath were the words, 'Portrait of my favourite singer'. I can't remember what was written on the walls specifically about the Beatles, but I know they came in for very honourable mentions many times.

I also know I was kept busy scrubbing the walls clean, because I didn't want the cleaning staff to see the graffiti. The cleaning ladies were very uptight elderly Liverpool characters who had old-fashioned ideas about love, marriage and sexual intercourse.

After the health authorities told me the state of the ladies' loo was unsatisfactory, I decided to have it decorated (it had never had a lick of paint from the day we opened) and I called in my odd-job men, the Beatles.

'Listen,' I addressed the lads who one day would be making

millions of pounds a year, 'how would you like to earn yourselves a few bob?'

Paul answered, 'You bet we would, Allan. Who do you want killing, like?' They all had a laugh.

'Very funny, Paul,' I said. 'I can think of a lot of people I would like to get rid of. But no, it's the ladies' loo.'

'Oh, yes?' said Stuart. 'What's up with it? You want us to clean it out or something?'

They all pulled faces.

'That'd put me off women for life,' said one of them.

'Clean it? Yes, I suppose so. But it's also got to be decorated 'cause I'm in trouble with the city health authorities. They're not satisfied with it. They've told me I've got to do it up — or else. Now how about it, lads? Will you have a go?'

George said, 'Okay, Al, what's in it for us then? It's a bloody awful job, isn't it?'

'I'll tell you what I'll do. A damned good offer. When you work, you make ten quid a night, right?'

'Right,' they chirped.

'Okay, so I'll give you ten quid for doing the loo — cleaning and painting it. It's more than a night's gig money.'

'How do you make that out?' asked Lennon, giving me that lopsided tough-guy look. He never trusted anyone, that boy, even at that age.

The Beatles weren't getting many engagements and they were always in need of money. George and Paul had some sort of piddling jobs off and on. Tommy was grafting away at the horrible bottle works (the Glass Menagerie, they used to call it). John and Stuart attended the Art College, when they felt like it.

'Listen, John. You get ten quid a night if and when you work. I'll give you all ten quid between you, and you don't have to pay expenses. So you're showing a good profit.'

They mumbled among themselves and accepted my offer.

During the day, while they were working on the loo, the situation would be awkward. When any of our female customers wanted to spend a penny, I called to John, Paul and Stuart — Tommy wasn't around — 'Come on, boys, you've got a customer. Just a few minutes' break.'

While the girl was attending to her needs, the Beatles had a coffee and a break.

They painted beautiful rock'n'roll scenes on the walls of the loo. Later they did similar work in the basement. In my opinion, these were quite brilliant examples of primitive art. The word 'primitive' is often used to describe something crude and ugly, but in this instance I use the word in its artistic sense — meaning simple, powerful.

The murals had a tremendous impact on the customers. An American professor of art called, if I remember rightly, Norman Crisp, was greatly impressed. He came to the Jac one night for a coffee. He was slumming around Liverpool with a group of friends. Immediately after he saw the murals he said, 'But these are superb. Who did them?'

I told him they were the work of a rock'n'roll group called the Beatles.

He seemed very amused by the name and said, 'I think they show great potential, whoever they are. Excellent stuff.' He asked if they were around and I told him he could meet them later that night when they would certainly be calling in.

Crisp and his friends waited for about two hours. The Beatles did not show up and I didn't see the professor again. Who knows what might have transpired if the professor had met the boys that night? They might have been diverted from their musical interests by his enthusiasm for their art and we might never have had the Beatles and the phenomenal changes they brought about in music and culture and the whole social pattern. If, if, if ...

The Jac was redecorated several times after that and the Beatles' murals were painted over. Perhaps today they would be worth a lot of money. They would undoubtedly deserve a place in a Beatles museum.

I think one of the boys signed the work somewhere. Most likely in the loo. That's the sort of place they would think appropriate, with their quirky sense of humour.

CHAPTER SIX

The steel fist says no

Since the night of my promotion at the Liverpool Boxing Stadium when Rory Storm had used his magnetic stage personality to calm the mob, I had kept in touch with Larry Parnes through phone calls and letters. One day I received a letter from him saying that he was coming to Liverpool with the pop star Billy Fury. Billy was very big in Britain at this time. He was a rather reticent boy who had been born and brought up in the South End of the city of Liverpool, where his family were still living. He had a mass of fair hair and a thin peaky face. The girls were mad about him. They would have eaten his socks for breakfast and saved the remains for sticking on their wall as a kind of shrine. He was that big.

Larry told me in the letter that he was looking for a backing group for Billy. He wanted me to round up as many of the Liverpool groups as I could muster and arrange an audition which he and Billy could attend.

At that time my business interests were going extremely well and I decided to open a club in Seel Street called the Blue Angel. There weren't many good nightclubs in Liverpool. Visitors to the city who wanted to savour some of the atmosphere of the place would often finish up in a shebeen — an illicit drinking club. The shebeen area was Liverpool 8, and there the darkies and the white folk met, as they say in the song.

This is how it worked: a West Indian, often sponsored by a businessman who kept in the background, would open a room in his house as a bar. According to the law, it was a members-only club, with a duly elected committee and a chairman and secretary. In fact, there were only two people involved — the front man who served in the bar and the guy who put up the money.

These shebeens were hangouts for some of the roughest, most

disease-ridden broads in the town. The girls received a couple of quid for what they called a 'short time' — either a knee-trembler in the nearest alley or a speedy visit to a nearby house. For ten bob, the girls made use of the front room — or parlour, as they called it in their cute Victorian way.

Sailors from all over the world came to the city — after they'd picked up some obscure disease in Panama or wherever. Before you knew it, some otherwise respectable businessman in Liverpool would be asking his doc, 'What's up with this, doc?' while flashing his pork sword.

My idea was for the Blue Angel to be a place of some class, where if you picked up a dose, at least it would be identifiable. No whores would be allowed in, though not much could be done about amateurs in strange disguises.

As the Blue Angel was nearing completion, I decided to hold the auditions for Larry and Billy there. I rounded up Cass and the Casanovas, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, and Derry and the Seniors, featuring Howie Casey. And the Beatles — minus their regular drummer, Tommy Moore, who was having girl friend trouble and hadn't turned up.

Rory and his boys were fresh from a triumphal season at Butlin's holiday camps in North Wales. Their drummer was a short, stocky guy with so many rings on his fingers he could hardly bend the joints. He wore a black motorcycle jacket and had his hair flicked forwards over his broad high forehead in the fashionable Tony Curtis/Elvis Presley style of the time. He had a big nose, which he was very conscious of, and spoke in a quiet voice. His name was Richard Starkey, alias Ringo Starr.

Everyone was nervously waiting for the big guy from London, Mister Larry Parnes. They all knew that if they were chosen, the way ahead would be bright, clear and exciting, for backing someone like Billy Fury would mean breaking out of the local scene. It would be pushing out from the muddy shores into the deep blue sea of possible riches and fame.

The boys stood about in the basement of the Blue, smoking frantically and drinking endless Cokes.

'Christ — how much you reckon Parnes'll pay, Allan?'

'Hey, Al, what's he like, this Parnes guy? Does he pay well?'

'Listen, Al, we hope this fucker isn't another one of those flash London bastards up here to take us for a ride.'

'Al, Al — if we get it, should we give up our jobs straight-away?'

'Hey, Al, where's the place to have a piss around here?'

The atmosphere was electric. I looked around at the boys messing about with their instruments. The naked electric light bulbs cast dark shadows across their craggy Liverpool faces.

Lennon was in one corner holding court. He had a cool, set smile on his face. Knowing John, I knew this was a cover-up for a severe bout of nerves.

Stuart Sutcliffe was gabbling to me about his painting and how he had been to see a local art exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery. The sweat was popping out on his face like a string of pearls.

The tension in the air was as tangible as congealed blood. The excitement and near-panic was so catching I began to get a touch of the dry heaves. I went out back to the lav and retched over a lavatory pan, but nothing came up. Then I had a drink of water out of the paint-spattered taps and went back in to the boys.

This was show business — the dry heaves in the back room of a half-finished nightclub in Liverpool, waiting for Mister Big to come walking in through the door.

I had left one of my men on the door of the Blue to look out for Parnes' arrival. He came running down the stairs into the basement, excited, eyes popping. 'Here he is. He's here. Parnes is here with Billy Fury. It's him.'

'Okay, okay,' I said. 'Jesus Christ he ain't. He's just another bloke. Now come on, lads,' I said, turning to the groups, 'I want you all to do your best. Put everything you've got into it.'

I felt like a general reviewing his troops before battle. The lads began to move around, busying themselves with checking their equipment. It was as though you had poked a stick into a mess of bees.

The groups talked more loudly. Someone did a couple of bars of 'Rock Around the Clock', the Bill Haley number.

John Lennon sidled over to me. 'You know, Al, that we've got no drummer. What'll we do?'

'Yeah,' I agreed. 'That's a problem.'

I looked at Lennon. Like the rest of the Beatles, he was wearing their usual outfit — a black polo-neck sweater from Marks

and Spencer, the big store, and black scruffy jeans with the knees bagged out from too much wear and not enough wash, and white baseball boots very much down at heel. Not a pretty sight. Dear God, what would Parnes think of this lot?

'I'll get a drummer for you from one of the other groups. You'll only be playing a couple of numbers. You'll get by. A guy like Parnes knows his onions. He can spot talent in any circumstances. Now don't worry, John. Let me do the worrying. Go and get ready.'

'Okay.' He sidled off towards the rest of the Beatles.

Larry Parnes and Billy came down the stairs and into the basement, peering into the harsh naked light that sliced through the gloom.

'Hello, Allan,' said Parnes. 'What's new? How you been keeping? This is Billy. You know Billy.'

'Hi, Billy.'

'Hi, Allan.'

I turned to the waiting groups. 'Boys, you all know who this is. Larry Parnes and Billy Fury. Say hello, boys.'

I was trying to get a little friendliness into the atmosphere and break down the groups' nervousness about the big guys from London.

The groups mumbled hello.

Larry and Billy looked like a million dollars. Their aftershave lotion swamped the place and both were wearing expensive silk suits, at that time the emblem of success.

I looked at the Beatles in their ragged clothes and scuffed baseball boots. They looked like something the cat dragged in on a very wet night. I felt a sudden fierce protective instinct towards my boys. All at once I wanted to say something like, 'I don't give a damn what you look like, I think you could be the greatest.'

Billy Fury was moody and tense. This was his stage image, and it seemed to carry over into his everyday life. I suppose it was difficult for him to shake it off. He was very pale, almost sick-looking. Even so, he had an air about him which said, 'I'm number one. Proceed with caution.'

'Okay,' said Larry, 'let's get started, shall we, Allan? Who you got lined up?'

'Over there,' I said, 'is Derry and the Seniors. There's Rory

Storm and the Hurricanes, Cass and the Casanovas. And that's the Beatles.'

As soon as I said 'the Beatles', I felt a quickening of interest from Parnes. He didn't say anything, but he let his eyes rest on them until I shouted to a couple of workmen to suspend their operations while the audition took place. They went and sat down in a dark corner to watch the proceedings.

Although Parnes listened politely enough to the other groups, I realised that he was particularly interested in the Beatles. They were hardly known at that time, but perhaps someone had alerted him to their potential.

When it came to their turn to play, it was painfully obvious that poor old Stuart couldn't play a note. Shy, as usual, and scared of being found out, he played with his back to the audience.

Billy Fury lost some of his tenseness and muttered excitedly to Parnes, 'this is it, Larry. This is the group I want. The Beatles will be marvellous.'

I saw Larry shake his head and say something and point. I knew he was pointing at Stuart.

Billy said out loud, 'That's it, the Beatles. I choose the Beatles.' He said it so that I could hear him plainly.

When the Beatles had finished, my heart was pounding with hope. Perhaps Parnes would take them despite Stuart, and my boys would be on their way.

The Beatles' faces were wreathed in smiles. They had seen how excited Billy Fury had been and had seen him single them out. For backing a star like Billy, they would get a hundred pounds a week each. More important, they would receive massive publicity and a showcase for their emerging talent. Riches and fame would be round the corner.

Parnes stood up. 'Thank you, boys, that was excellent.' Then he turned to me. 'Allan, can you get them to play something without the bass player?' He spoke so that only I could hear.

Poor Stuart. My heart hit my boots. Parnes had spotted the one big flaw in the Beatles. Their powerful gutsy music couldn't cover up the fact that Stuart couldn't play a note. In fact, he rarely tried. He merely let his hands wander over what he believed were roughly the right notes. He was not a musician and never would be one. Maybe if he'd taken a total immersion

course over a period of a million years, he might have been able to pick out something simple like 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'. But I doubt it.

You couldn't fool a professional like Parnes. He was on to Stuart right away. The game was up. But was it? Billy Fury was still arguing with Larry in a low fierce voice.

I hesitated to ask the boys for another number minus Stuart, because I didn't want to hurt Stu or upset the rest of the lads by trying to break up the group — even for the very good reason that to winkle out Stuart could put them on the way to a hell of a lot of money.

Parnes said something to Billy which seemed to quieten the star and then he looked at me.

'Okay, Allan, how about it? Do we hear some more without the bass player or don't we? Come on, we haven't got all day. We need to get a group fast. I think these boys are great, but let's have 'em without the boy on bass.'

So with Derry and the boys and Cass and Rory and Ringo and everyone standing round, I said to the Beatles, 'Mister Parnes wants you to play another number, boys.'

'Okay, Al. What do you want us to play?'

'Just a minute, boys, there's something else.' I felt a right cunt.

'Yeah?' the voice was McCartney's.

The unshaded light bulb over the Beatles cast a fuzzy unrelenting light which made them look like fixtures in some macabre waxworks scene. George had stuck a ciggie in his mouth during the break and a thin trickle of blue smoke drifted slowly up to the ceiling. The cellar was strangely quiet. In the distance you could hear the faint rumble of traffic up and down Seel Street. Upstairs one of the cleaners was using a vacuum and the thin whine percolated down to us.

'Come on, lads,' I said, 'just for one number Mister Parnes would like to hear you without Stuart. He's just curious. You understand? Okay?'

I felt as though I had been caught out trying to drown someone's kitten. How could I do this to Stuart? He was the Beatle I felt closest to. We had spent many hours talking about his painting and the exhibitions. The boy never moved anywhere without his drawing and painting kit slung over his shoulder. He

had dreams of being a great painter. But he didn't try to kid himself about his guitar-playing. Nor did he try to pull the wool over anyone else's eyes. Oh sure, he would stand up in front of an audience and make out he was in there driving the music along. He was such a nice bloke that he couldn't even do this without embarrassment, so he would stand with his back three-quarters to the audience so they couldn't see his hands making the futile movements. And he loved the Beatles, loved them like brothers. They were a family. And here was I being instrumental in trying to break them up.

It was one of the worst moments of my life.

'Okay, boys?' I repeated when I got no answer.

'No, it's not okay.' The voice was Lennon's. Hard, flat, final and contemptuous. Like a steel fist.

'No? Not one song?' Even as I started to wheedle I felt a great lump come in my throat. I should have known what the reaction would be. They were loyal to each other, like a band of brothers. Tough talking lads, they didn't let up on each other. They could be vicious and mean and show a spiteful sense of humour, and they often made Stuart the butt of their somewhat malicious sense of fun. But they were solid as a rock when the outside world threatened their group.

'Nothing, Al, not a song Sorry, we can't do it,' said one of them.

'That's right, Al, impossible.'

'No go.' They all chipped in with their two-penn'orth of defiance.

I wanted to rush over and hug them despite the fact that they were throwing away their golden chance at the big time.

'Come on, boys, for me . . .' My voice faded away, I didn't have my heart in it.

I heard Larry Parnes clear his throat and he whispered, 'Forget it, Allan. I don't want to start any trouble. They're good boys. They want to stay together. But the bass player's awful, you must admit that, even though you are their manager.'

I didn't answer that one.

Someone among the other groups strummed a few notes of 'Laura' and the tension was eased.

Lennon said, 'Allan, you know better than that. We're a group. All or none. Take us all or none. That's the way it is.'

Big tough Lennon with a great big heart.

I felt like cheering. Their names in lights, a hundred quid a week each, Parnes to steer them through the treachery of show biz — all forsaken, hurled back, disdained. Balls to the world, to the bright lights, the money, the fame. God, if you'd seen it in a corny Hollywood movie, you wouldn't have believed it.

Larry Parnes said, 'Well, there it is. I'll take you on to back Billy. He wants you. I want you. I think you're great and will be greater yet. We do not want the bass player. He's out. So if you change your minds, let me know. But make it soon.'

Larry was right, of course, to try and prise the Beatles away from a dud bass player. He had no chance of doing it, though. But both he and Billy Fury had seen the very special quality the Beatles had even in that early stage of their development. My own opinion was confirmed, and I was delighted on that score. The audition was disastrous in a way, but at least it had strengthened my resolve to push the Beatles on, even with a guitar player who couldn't play the guitar.

Larry and Billy asked for the next group to go on and it seemed the Beatles were dismissed from their thoughts. They couldn't raise much enthusiasm for the others, and while they carried on with the audition, I buttonholed Stuart.

We went into a corner and he said, 'I'm sorry, Allan. I really am.'

'That's okay, Stuart, don't worry.' There was no point in calling him a prick for not being a natural-born musician like the rest of the Beatles. No point in rubbing his face in the shit.

'Listen, Stuart, I want you to do something for me. Have you got your art kit with you?'

'Yeah, it's over there, on that chair,' he said, nodding his head towards the canvas bag he took everywhere. Stuart was always making sketches of scenes and places that he could paint later.

'Right. Get your gear out and do a sketch of Larry and Billy. That'll please them. You know how these big show-business people are. They like to think they're the centre of attraction.'

Stuart didn't like the idea. Although he had robbed the Beatles of their chance at the big time, he didn't want to do this to please me.

'But why? Why the hell should I?'

'To show them that the Beatles aren't just another group.

That they have some genuine artistic ability in other directions too.'

I had been telling Parnes and Billy how talented the boys were in drawing and painting. I thought Stuart's doing a sketch of them there and then would create a pleasing image, wipe out the memory of the group's blunt and seemingly ungrateful refusal to dump one of their members.

'No, I won't do it. Balls to them,' said Stuart. 'They tried to get rid of me, break the group up. Why should I do a picture of them? No.'

'Please, please, Stu. For me. It's not much I'm asking. It'll only take you a few minutes. Look, do it now while they're auditioning the rest of the lads.'

Begrudgingly, Stuart agreed. 'Christ. Okay then. You tell them I'll do it.'

Both Parnes and Billy were delighted and Stuart did a quick sketch of them sitting side by side. He signed it and handed the picture to Parnes.

'Thanks,' said Parnes. 'No hard feelings. You understand.'

'Yeah, don't worry about me,' said Stuart. But I knew Stuart. He would worry. Perhaps later he would cry and crucify himself mentally because he had ruined the Beatles' chances. He was like that. He gave himself a tremendously tough time, always raking about in his tortured mind, self-accusing, self-questioning.

After Parnes and Fury had finished auditioning without any success, I drove them to see Billy's folks at their home in the South End of the city. On the way they both started in on me about getting rid of Stuart.

'Those boys must be crazy. That guy'll never play a guitar as long as he lives, Allan.'

'He just hasn't got a clue.'

'Listen, Al, you tell 'em the offer's still open.'

'Do your best, Al. They're good, they're great.'

It was a constant barrage all the way to Billy's place.

'There's no chance. When those boys make up their minds, there's not much will shake 'em. I'll try again. But take it from me, all that will do will be to make them turn against me for a while.'

I didn't make any further attempt, as it turned out. I knew it

was useless and I didn't want to create any antagonism among them. There would be other chances, better days. The good times were gonna roll for sure one of these days.

As I drove back towards town, I stopped to buy a bag of fish and chips. I needed time to think. I drove down to the docks to watch the big ships go out and savour the strange exotic smells of the cargoes on the dockside. Here was the real essence of Liverpool. I liked to listen to the dockers' quick humour. Hard-edged, but always with a certain warmth. I could see the big fat grey snake of the Mersey rolling out towards the sea. There was the sound of the siren of a ship sailing slowly out towards the Irish Sea, bound for New York, no doubt. In those days, the big liners still carried many passengers between the two great ports.

A gang of seagulls swooped down low over my head as I walked along the dockside. They could see I was eating something. The white flash of the newspaper wrapped round the fish and chips had signalled to them a potential supply of food. There was a dirty bank of dark cloud hanging over the Mersey in the direction of Chester and the Wirral, not a touch of sun anywhere. Jeeezus Christ, I thought, what a missed opportunity for the Beatles. And me.

I went into a dockside pub. It was warm and snug, the lights bouncing off the old red polished bar top and the thick ornamental mirrors. There was the clamour of the thick guttural Scouse speech and snatches of laughter. Someone started to sing a drunken song and trailed away into gibberish.

As I stared gloomily at my pint of black and tan — that's Guinness and beer mixed — three guys came into the pub. I knew one of them. He had been a bouncer for me at the Jac and now he was working on the docks.

'Here, Al, what the fuck's up with you? You look as though you lost a quid and found a penny. Here, cheer up, for Christ's sake. Have a bloody drink.'

'Thanks, Harry, I'll have a black and tan. Might as well be pissed as the way I am.' I was beginning to feel melancholy. And there is nothing more melancholy than a Liverpudlian with a lot of Welsh blood in his veins.

By the time I had had four more points, I had snapped out of the black mood and Harry had persuaded me to sing a song at the pub piano.

I have a pretty reasonable tenor voice. I had voice training, but gave up any idea of a serious career when I developed a throat condition. My music master told me that I might have made the big time as a solo artist, but that's another story.

Anyway, I sang a song, one of my favourites, 'The Rose of Tralee'. Halfway through I realised that the pub crowd was listening intently. Even the drunks were quiet. I had them. There was that magical feeling that any performer treasures, that moment when you know you are in the brains and hearts of your audience and you and you alone are in charge of their very souls.

At that moment I felt the tears coursing down my cheeks. I stopped singing abruptly. 'Ah, fuck the lot of yez, I said and ran out of the pub and drove like a demon back into town.

I wonder even now if Larry Parnes hung on to that picture poor old Stu gave him that day when the Beatles said no.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A bum group like the Beatles

It wasn't all bad news from the Parnes quarter, however. Out of that meeting, I had further contact with him and I signed an agreement to provide backing groups, including the Beatles. The sort of people they were to back were Duffy Power, Tommy Bruce, Joe Brown, Peter Wynne, Dickie Pride and Georgie Fame.

The first group I sent out on the road with Parnes' stars was Cass and the Casanovas. They came back bitterly disappointed, saying that the wages were not enough to live on. I had a lot of trouble with Larry over this. I'm not blaming him entirely. Things seemed to be going wrong all round and a lot of bad feeling was engendered.

It then came the Beatles' turn to go on tour in Scotland, where they were to back Johnny Gentle in all the glamorous places like Galashiels and Inverness. I packed them off, wishing them the best of luck. In a couple of days I got an irate phone call from Larry Parnes. Duncan McKenna, one of the Scottish promoters, had rung him to complain about the Beatles. He had told Parnes, 'What the heck are you doing sending me a bum group like this mob the Beatles?' This was before he heard them play. He was basing his attack on their scruffy appearance, their Marks and Sparks gear, the black sweaters and jeans and running shoes. They had arrived bedraggled and hungry and McKenna bawled Parnes out about the fact that he was used to getting the best musicians and along comes this ragged-looking band from Liverpool.

Anyway, the trouble blew over and the Beatles did their stint in Scotland. They pointed out to the promoters that what they stood up in was all they owned, and if the promoters didn't like it, so what?

The scene was aggravated even more by incidents which oc-

curred while several other of my groups toured Scotland with singing stars from London. My groups were flexing their muscles. They could feel the audience response, which reached across the footlights and gripped them like a fist. Cass of Cass and the Casanovas, for instance, had literally pushed the star he was supposed to be backing offstage and taken over himself, singing all the star's numbers.

My groups were good and they knew it. They resented their secondary roles and you couldn't blame them. Of course, it was rather unfortunate for the London singers to have to contend with such rumbustious and colourful groups as mine. And my boys didn't have the stomach for the wishy-washy Londoners. I don't like to sound too chauvinistic about Liverpool, but the difference between a Liverpool and a London musician or singer was as wide and varied as the difference between a flea and an elephant. There really was no common ground. This was the reason why in the end we lost the work in Scotland. Personality conflict, clash of wills, difference in primary colours.

Perhaps Parnes should have realised how good the Liverpool groups were and put them on with their own shows. But if he did see their potential, he didn't seem to care. No reflection on Larry. He's doing damn well, I understand. In a fly-by-night business, he has proved a stayer, going from strength to strength. Which I can't truthfully claim would be a fitting description for me. But . . . on with the tale.

The Liverpool Sound was no more than a bellow from the wings, as it were. The Beatles were getting paid ten quid a week per man in Scotland, and since they had to pay a lot of their own expenses, that didn't leave much for the luxuries.

Some indication of Lennon's perverse nature emerged during the Scottish tour. The Beatles arrived at a railway station while travelling across Scotland on a miserable, wet, windy day. As usual, they were starving, and as usual, Lennon, whose appetite was gargantuan to the point of gluttony, thought of food. Their funds would stretch only to items such as soup and sandwiches, and Lennon called for tomato soup in the station restaurant.

The waitress was a young, inexperienced local girl who looked with suspicion and alarm on the five piratical-looking boys from Liverpool. When she brought the soup and placed it in front of Lennon, he fixed her with his aggressively insolent

Liverpool stare and ground out, 'I ordered tomato soup. Where are the tomatoes, love? No tomatoes here.' He stirred the canned tomato soup with his spoon.

Whoever heard of tomatoes in tomato soup? But Lennon had decided to interpret meticulously the description of the dish set before him by the startled waitress. He repeated his request for tangible tomatoes in his tomato soup, and the scene became so heated that the waitress fled and brought the manager.

This, of course, didn't frighten tough-guy Lennon.

Tough-guy Lennon didn't frighten the tough-guy manager, either. On seeing this, Lennon, as only he could do it, changed gear from being nasty, rude and aggressive into being flippant and jocular. Such was (and is) his presence that the manager and waitress were prepared to go along with his new mood. Lennon was able to convince them that the whole thing had been a joke from beginning to end.

This was a typical Lennon frolic — the humour with the jagged edge. A strike at the jugular followed by a smile. Strange, strange boy.

Tommy Moore, whom I regularly see around Liverpool, told me, 'I didn't like Lennon. I couldn't stand him. He had some awful ways. He was an absolute gannet where food was concerned. He'd wolf down everything in his path in such an obnoxious and beastly — that's the only word — ill-mannered way, it would make me feel physically sick and put me off my food just to watch him.' Tommy shuddered at the memory.

'He always insisted on getting the best accommodation available. Usually on that tour we got two bedrooms between the five of us. Lennon would never sleep three in a room. He was always the one who went into the double for the extra comfort it might afford. He was a very aggressive boy.'

Tommy lost his front teeth on the Scottish tour and to this day he still shows the gaps. It gives him a little-boy all-I-want-for-Christmas-is-my-two-front teeth appearance. Rather endearing.

A Liverpool singer who shall be nameless offered to drive the Beatles' van between gigs. He didn't have a licence, and he also liked a drink. Somehow the van collided with a car containing two dear old spinster ladies on a one-way street. The ladies were only shaken but the inside of the Beatles' van was chaos. The

impact threw the boys on to the floor of the van in a mass of legs and arms, guitars and drum kit. There were cries of 'What the fuck's going on?' amid the crashing of instruments and the thrashing around of the thoroughly frightened Beatles.

No one in the Beatles' van was hurt except Tommy, who received a very fierce blow in the face from a flying guitar case. He was dragged out of the chaos and rushed along to the local hospital where he was told he had lost his teeth. He needed a local anaesthetic and a stitching job on his face.

Meanwhile, the Beatles drove on to their gig in the neighbourhood yelling the equivalent of 'The show must go on'.

The local promoter didn't like the look of a group without a drummer. He asked what had happened to Tommy Moore, the guy named on the contracts.

George Harrison told him the bad news and then Lennon said, 'Why don't you go to the hospital and drag him out? He's not badly hurt. Tommy won't mind.' That evil Lennon streak at work again. He smiled when he said it, never thinking that the desperate promoter was in a mood to do anything to get a drummer on stage.

The promoter, urged on by Lennon, rushed out to his car and drove rapidly to the hospital, where he found Tommy lying in bed groggy from the after-effects of drugs and having his face stitched up. He looked like something out of a horror movie.

But the promoter was a determined man. 'Come on, Tommy,' he shouted at the drummer. 'The Beatles need you. They're on stage right now waiting.'

'Jesus Christ,' groaned Tommy, prising himself on to one elbow. 'Don't be crazy, man. Can't you see I'm badly hurt?'

'Come on, Tommy,' said the promoter, 'you'll be all right once you get on stage.'

So Tommy, grumbling and moaning through the pain and the drugs, hauled himself out of his hospital bed, grabbed his clothes and pulled them on. Painfully, he piled into the promoter's car.

When he got to the dance hall, Lennon greeted him with a hoot of laughter. 'Look at your face,' he howled with devilish glee. He thought Tommy was a marvellously funny sight.

Tommy played the drums all night, struggling manfully on, racked with pain. From time to time Lennon would turn his

back on the audience to have a good look at Tommy and break out into laughter all over again.

Quite understandably, Tommy, the best drummer the Beatles ever had, doesn't have many good words for his fellow Beatle, John Lennon. 'He could be a bloody nasty guy.'

When the Beatles got back from their Scottish tour they arrived at Lime Street Station at five o'clock in the morning. Tommy came back the richest, with five pounds in his pocket. The others had less than that between them.

'I'd had a bellyful of that Scottish tour when we got back,' said Tommy. 'And I'd had a bellyful of Lennon. You know, I think he was sick. He seemed to love watching the fights that broke out in the dance halls between the rival gangs. He'd say, "Hey, look at that guy putting the boot in there". He got a sadistic delight out of it all. At least his conduct indicated this.

'When our train pulled in to Liverpool, the rest of the lads went to the tea van that used to be sited just across the road in Lime Street. I said, "Good night, lads", and took a cab home. I was pissed off with Lennon. I had had enough of him.'

One of the reasons the rest of the Beatles were so broke was that they had been paying Stuart's wages out of their own fees. Parnes had refused to pay him, remembering — from the Billy Fury audition — that he couldn't play his instrument. But the Beatles were very loyal boys, as I have already pointed out, and they saw that Stuart didn't go short.

On the Scottish tour, Lennon and McCartney would pull the plug leads from Stuart's amplifier so that his bumbling attempts to play the guitar wouldn't interfere with the group's sound. Ignorant of this, Stuart would painstakingly and pitifully work through the night. Then, later, Paul and John would tell him that all his efforts had been in vain. Stuart's reaction would be to blush and writhe in embarrassment. 'They were rotten sods at times,' he told me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Could have been wearing diamond garters

The Beatles came back from Scotland much better musicians. It was a major time in their development; their group sound was beginning to bloom like an exotic orchid in a greenhouse. They kicked their heels again for a while back in Liverpool, hanging around the Jac, talking to the rest of the musicians, swopping stories about their tours. Then I got them a date at the Grosvenor Ballroom across the Mersey. On the night they were due to go on the gig I was at home, having my usual evening kippers from the Isle of Man and a mug of hot sweet tea when the phone rang.

The voice was Lennon's — worried and panicky. 'Listen, Allan' (you could tell how worried he was — normally he called me Al), 'we're all here, ready to go over the water on our gig, but what do you think . . .?'

I wiped the kipper from my mouth and said, 'No, what do I think?'

'There's no fucking drummer.'

'What the hell do you mean, no fucking drummer? Where the fuck is Tommy, your regular fucking drummer?' I was beginning to share his panic and urgency.

Lennon went on: 'Tommy just hasn't turned up. His kit's here, but no fucking Tommy. The prick. He's letting us down. You gotta do something.'

I heard the rest of the Beatles shouting from the background. Things like 'Come on Al, do something.'

Tommy's very expensive drum kit was at the Jac but not Tommy. It was most unlike him to be late or to let the boys down.

What had happened was that Tommy had allowed this woman he was living with in Liverpool 8 to browbeat him into giving up playing with the Beatles because she considered it a

waste of time and the money too irregular. (I wonder how she feels now. She could have been married to a millionaire and be wearing diamond garters and dripping in mink.) She wanted Tommy to go back to his 'good steady job' at the Garston Bottle Works. How about that? The Garston Bottle Works. Even the name has the sound of doom. She loves you, yeah yeah yeah. I knew this, so I wasn't really so surprised when I heard Tommy hadn't turned up.

I raced out to my car, the taste of Manx kippers still in my mouth. I belted down Huskisson Street through a set of red traffic lights, hurtled around Falkner Square and on down the hill in front of the Cathedral. As I pulled up to halt outside the Jac, smoke was steaming out of my tyres.

The Beatles came running out of the Jac.

'Come on, Al, what do we do?'

'This is panic stations.'

'Tommy's turned out a right cunt.'

'Think, Al, think. What can we do?'

'Where do we get a fucking drummer!'

'Come on, lads, don't fuck about, jump in. We'll go and sort the sod out.'

They all piled in and I was off and away as the last one pulled the car door shut.

Tommy's flat in Liverpool 8 wasn't far. This formerly wealthy area was now mostly flats. One or two old spinster ladies who had inherited houses and clung to some of the finery of past ages were holed up here and there, but, in general, it wasn't an area where spinster ladies liked to live alone. In Liverpool 8 lived poets, pimps, whores, professional gamblers, marijuana dealers, artists, con men, novelists and musicians. There was a brothel and a shebeen on nearly every block. My kind of place — a pulsating tapestry rich in characters and incident. You soaked in the atmosphere through your very pores. Once you lived any length of time there, it never let you go. If you left, the raw memory of it would haunt you till you went back.

We knocked on the door of the house where Tommy had his flat on the first floor. The window of the flat flew up with a bang and Tommy's woman stuck her head out.

Very aggressively and angrily, she shouted down to us, 'What do yez want?'

Brief and to the point, as though cheering a favourite player on the football field, we shouted back, 'We want Tommy Moore. We want Tommy Moore. That's who we want.'

'Well, yez can't bloody have him,' she replied, preparing to pull the window down and shut us out of sight. 'You Beatles are no bloody good to man nor beast. Go away.'

Tommy told me later that she had given him a hell of a hard time. 'None of this larking about with them Beatles. Get a good steady job, you deadbeat,' she had screamed at him.

I looked at my wristwatch. There wasn't much time. I didn't want the Beatles to get a reputation for turning up late for engagements so early in their career.

I heard the boys muttering behind me.

'Give her a blast, Allan.'

'Tell the bitch where she gets off.'

'Talking about the Beatles like that. Steady on, missus, I might tell my mum of you.'

We were standing in a splash of yellow light from a street lamp. We must have looked to Tommy's woman like an unwelcome group of strolling players.

I had left the car engine running, hoping we might pick up Tommy quickly and zoom to the gig. Time was slipping away. So was my patience. I get moments when I feel: what the fuck is it all about? Is it worth going on? Is the game worth the candle? What was I doing there on that cold and windy night standing under a street lamp with four guys who called themselves musicians arguing with this woman who had her head out of the window?

Stuart said, 'Christ, Al, time's going on. What are we doing arguing here? We need a drummer fast. We're not going to get Tommy — that's a fact. Not if this bitch gets her way.'

I raised my arm and swept it round to encompass the Beatles.

'Listen. You know these are the Beatles, don't you?'

'Yeah,' she said. 'I know they're the Beatles. They are the bloody people who have kept my Tommy messing about away from his proper job at the bottle works. That's why he's got no money now and why I've got no bloody money. Yeah, I know you're the bloody Beatles. And I know who you are too.'

Her voice was thick with loathing and contempt. Tommy had

spent a lot of time away from home, and he hadn't made a lot of money with the Beatles. She had cause for complaint.

'Tommy has agreed to play with the lads at the Grosvenor Ballroom tonight. We should all be on our way there now. Don't you understand? A deal's a deal.'

The Beatles' anxiety was increasing.

'Come on, Missus Woman, we gotta have Tommy.'

'Bring out your Tommy.'

'We want Tommy.'

'Tommy, Tommy, Tommy. For Christ's sake, missus, we want Tommy.'

The woman's head disappeared from the window.

'That's it, boys,' I said. 'She's pissed off. Tommy'll be at the bloody bottle works now, you can bet your bottom dollar. She's driven him back there with her evil, vicious, fucking tongue.'

The woman's head came back into the frame of light from the window.

'I heard that, you bastard,' she said. 'Now you can piss off. The lot of yez. He's fed up with the lot of yez. If he goes back with the likes of you, he's finished as far as I am concerned.'

'Lady,' said one of the Beatles, 'that would be giving Tommy a break, finishing with you.'

The woman's voice rose into an unintelligible scream of fury. Then she said, clearly enough, 'He's at the fucking works and that's where he's staying.' The window slammed down.

Just think of the alternatives poor Tommy had that night. The Beatles, or the night shift at the Garston Bottle Works.

The night shift at Garston Bottle Works. It sounded like a judgment handed down from the devil himself. A lifetime sentence in a bottle factory. You are sentenced to . . . Tommy lad, we have to rescue you, I thought.

I cupped my hands round my mouth, determined to have a last blast at this Liverpool lady.

'Ah, you nasty old bag,' I screamed up at the tightly shut window. 'Why don't you play the fucking game? Here we are hanging round like a bunch of spare pricks for your fucking Tommy . . .'

My voice trailed off. My stomach was beginning to act up again. I could feel the bile flowing through and swilling round my ulcer. I needed a glass of soothing milk.

'Ah, come on, lads,' I said to the Beatles, 'let's make it fast to the fucking bottle works.'

We got back into the car. I am not a slow driver. In fact, I have been told I am a spectacularly fast driver. On a race-track, I would have been up there with the Jackie Stewarts of this world — or I would have been sent home in a very small plastic bag.

So I put my foot down and we headed for Garston, a suburb of Liverpool a few short minutes away. The Beatles, in the back, were whooping and hollering and spurring me on to greater feats of derring-do. I was still fuming against that Liverpool lady. She was the reason I had been dragged away from my kippers for tea and was now haring about all over the bloody city, my stomach churning.

We pulled up at the Garston Bottle Works in a shower of loose cinders. Garston Bottle Works: the graveyard of one Beatle.

I asked one of the workmen to direct me to the foreman. He would be the only bloke to tell us where Tommy was working.

'Here, mate. You lot looking for jobs?'

One of the Beatles said, 'No, we're looking for a bloke called Tommy Moore. D'you know him?'

'Nah, never heard of him. The foreman's over there in that shed.' He pointed to a small office just inside the main building. 'That's his cubbyhole.'

We knocked on the door and the foreman came out. He was a very reasonable type with a typical square Liverpool-Irish face and a flat hat on the back of his head. A mass of grey curls stuck out round it like a ragged halo.

'Well now, what's all this? You looking for jobs? No jobs here, mate. It's like everywhere else. No jobs.'

Jobs were hard to find in those days and Liverpool was among the places in Britain hardest hit by unemployment. I suppose that's why Tommy had taken the job so quickly when it became available.

'No thanks,' I said, 'we're looking for a guy called Tommy Moore.'

'Tommy Moore, Tommy Moore,' repeated the foreman slowly, trying to fit the name with a face.

'Ah yes, Tommy. You'll find him in the Black Shed. You

friends of his? You're not trying to dun him for debts or anything?'

'Now, do we look like debt collectors?' chipped in Lennon.

Dear God, don't let John get nasty with this nice old guy. Please, please, John.

'Okay, John,' I said, 'hang on. Thanks, mate,' I said to the foreman.

'I'll take you over,' said the foreman, giving John a hard look. 'Come on.'

It now seemed ages since I had got the Beatles' panic phone call from the Jac. The Grosvenor Ballroom was a million light years away from Garston Bottle Works.

In the distance, we saw a forklift truck manoeuvring about.

'That's him,' said the foreman. 'That's Tommy.'

'Christ,' said Stuart, 'I didn't even know he could drive a thing like that.'

'Oh, aye,' said the foreman. 'He's worked here before, you know, has Tommy.'

'Yeah, I know,' said a Beatle's voice, 'poor bastard.'

'Eh? Eh? What was that?' said the foreman.

We had to get out of there fast — if we were not to be thrown out on our Beatle's ear. It was no place for Beatles, no place for Tommy.

As we drew near we shouted, 'Hey, Tommy, Tommy, it's us. What the fuck are you up to with that thing?'

'Come on, Tommy. Get down out of there,' shouted John Lennon.

Tommy brought the machine to a halt and in the strong red light from the main works I could see he had a sheepish look on his face.

'Hello, lads. Yeah, yeah, I know. We shoulda been at the Grosvenor. It's no go. I just can't do it any more.'

Paul McCartney said, 'Come on, Tommy. How can we get by without a drummer? You're too good for this lot.' He swept his arm round to indicate the works and all its bottles.

'Here,' said the foreman, 'this is a bloody good place to work. You steady on, mate.'

'Ah, take no notice,' I said to the foreman. 'They're only kidding. It's a marvellous place.'

'You can't let us down like this,' said one Beatle.

'Tommy, you're a fucking loser if you stay here.'

'Tommy, this is curtains for you.'

'Come with us, Tommy, we just started out in this game. Fuck a duck, you can't do this.'

But it seemed that dear, dear Tommy could. The best drummer the Beatles ever had sat up there on that goddam forklift thing, letting his hope, his life, fade away. I can still see him — front teeth missing from the unfortunate Scottish incident, lugubriously looking down at the lot of us.

'I can't do it, lads. The Beatle days are over for me. You been round to my flat?'

'Yeah,' we told him, we'd been round to his house and met his woman who had been giving him all that stick simply because he had wanted to do what he was good at.

'What did she say, then?' asked Tommy, frightened that we might have made her madder.

'She said you were through with us,' said John. 'You were back here at the bottle works.'

This chat was getting us nowhere nearer to the Grosvenor Ballroom over the other side of the big wide Mersey.

'Look,' said Tommy, 'I've got mouths to feed. I'm not like the rest of you. I'm a working lad who has to make some money to feed the people who depend on me. I can't go on like this any more,' he finished up, with some conviction in his voice. 'Honest I can't — she'd fuckin' kill me.'

This was the way it was (and is) with the working classes. The very need to survive, to fill bellies, stifles many a stirring of genius. I'm not making out that Tommy was exactly a genius, but he was a great drummer. And if you think they're easy to find in any neck of the woods, just go out and try rooting one up right now.

'But, Tommy — can you switch that fucking engine off? — Tommy, listen to me. Just do tonight's gig. Just tonight.'

If I can get him out of this place, I thought, I might talk sense into him.

The foreman with his halo of iron curls said with alarm, 'Here, come on now, lads, I didn't let you into this fuckin' place so you could steal my labour. Now you leave Tommy alone. He's a good lad on that forklift.'

Everyone wanted Tommy.

Tommy wouldn't switch his engine off and Stuart yelled, 'It's your last chance, Tommy. Here and now. We're asking you for the last fuckin' time. Are you coming, or aren't you?'

'No,' bawled Tommy. 'Sorry, lads, I need more than a measly fiver a week to keep me and mine. You ought to know that. Christ, I don't mind going on a diet. But starving's a different kettle of fuckin' fish. Sorry, boys.'

A Beatle shouted in last-ditch desperation, 'Don't be a cunt,' but Tommy was not to be moved. He stayed glued to the seat of that forklift truck, sadness and determination in his grimy face. That Liverpool lady had put the fear of God into him. Tommy had finished with the Beatles.

'There'll be other tours, Tommy,' I ranted above the din of his damned forklift truck as he fiddled with the gears, ready to charge off to his bottles. 'There'll be other chances. Better times. You'll see.'

'Sorry, Allan. It's not on. You've been to my place, you see how things are.'

I still felt like dragging Tommy off that truck, but what was the use? His mind had been made up for the poor bastard.

'Ah, fuck it, Allan,' said one of the lads. 'Let's go. He won't come now. He's all washed up, the poor cunt. We'll get by without him.'

We all called Tommy a few choice names. At one point I thought he would get down off his forklift and give us a four-penny one. But 'See ya, boys,' was all he said, and trundled off.

'There you are, then,' said the foreman. 'Musicians, are you? That's a nice way to earn a coupla bob. Better than this any day.'

He had a point there In a crazy, knockdown, drag-out world, we were more suited to a precarious kind of survival than Tommy was.

We walked back to the car in silence. 'We'd better get a move on,' I said. 'The bloody Grosvenor Ballroom will think you're never coming.'

Luckily I had arranged for the Beatles' instruments to be sent on ahead to the Grosvenor in a van driven by one of my bouncers, Big Mac.

Going through the Mersey Tunnel, which then had four lanes, we must have touched a hundred in my Jaguar. Despite

the protracted arguments and pleading with Tommy and his rotten woman we weren't very late.

I explained to the promoter the difficulties about the drummer, and he didn't seem to mind. As long as the Beatles produced some sort of music, it would be all right, he said.

'They're a tough lot around here. They don't like being stood up. And if they get something they don't like, they tend to make their objections known with the toe of their boot.'

I already knew about the Grosvenor's reputation. No matter where you went on Merseyside, you could strike trouble by breathing too hard in those days.

CHAPTER NINE

You gotta laugh 'cause look at us now

When the Beatles went on stage there was the usual mob of kids determined on mischief. They stood around watching the Beatles arrange their instruments and get settled down. One of the gangs there was led by a tall bloke called Ronnie, a pansy-sounding name for a real terror. (A tearaway, as they say in London and Liverpool.) He had a mass of red hair and stood six feet two inches, although he was only seventeen. He had hands like anchors, shoulders like a brick shithouse and piggy eyes which gleamed out uncertainly, madly, at a highly suspect and bewildering world. He looked tougher than Jack Palance, and was most certainly uglier than that kind gentleman.

Ronnie didn't think much of the world, and the feeling was mutual. So Ronnie liked hurting people. He was happiest gouging an eye here and there, inserting his boot into someone's rib cage or, better still, butting them in the face with his head. This usually resulted in the victim being taken away to the nearest hospital for a quick realignment of his broken proboscis.

Not a nice boy, Ronnie. And he had all his gang round him that night, ready to respond to his every brutal whim. He stared at the Beatles. They tried to ignore him, but it was like trying to ignore the Black Death.

Lennon cleared his throat and grabbed the house microphone at the centre of the stage: 'Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, women and children . . . ah hem . . .' Lennon thought he might like to make a funny announcement.

The rest of the Beatles groaned. This was no time for funny cracks. They wanted to play and get a convivial atmosphere going — fast.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' Lennon went on, 'no doubt some of you have noticed that because of circumstances quite beyond

our control, as they say in Government circles, we have arrived here with no drummer. Now, we can play with no drummer. But it would be a better sound if we had one. If there is anyone among you lot who fancies himself on the skins, let's be having yer . . .'

Lennon sat down, grinning. This was his way of forestalling any trouble from dissatisfied customers who might take exception to getting an incomplete group. Good move, usually. But not that night. There just happened to be among the crowd one youth who fancied himself on the drums: Ronnie, our local Jack Palance.

'Hey, Skin' (Skin is a universal nickname, like Wack, on Merseyside), 'I can play the drums,' he shouted from among his grinning cronies.

The Beatles knew Ronnie. They had seen him in glorious Technicolored action chastising one of his opponents. They shuddered. What had Lennon got them into? The biggest thug in the place was about to become a Beatle.

Lennon's quick mind took in the situation. He was almost certain that the thug hadn't an earthly idea how to play the drums. He might have committed grievous bodily harm to a drummer and his drum kit in his chequered career, but that was the sum total of his knowledge of the drums.

'Christ, John,' said one of the Beatles, fidgeting nervously behind. 'What the fuck have you done to us?'

'You silly bugger,' said another.

'That bloke's a terror.'

The Beatles squirmed and shivered at the prospect which loomed in front of them. Ronnie, the Gene Krupa of the Wirral, came shambling forward out of the crowd, his apelike arms swinging to well below his knees. In his maniac mind, no doubt, there gleamed the spark of an ambition to be a musician, maybe indeed a drummer with a rock'n'roll band. So why not this band, who called themselves the Beatles? Perhaps the way to the stars was beckoning him here and now at the Grosvenor, scene of so many of his past bloody triumphs.

He vaulted onstage. The planks shuddered under his weight.

'Well . . .' said Lennon.

'Okay, Skin,' said Ronnie, contorting his homely features into what he used as a smile, 'here I am rarin' to go.'

'You played the drums before?' said Lennon, trying frantically to rescue the situation.

'Sure, I played.' The brutish features lost their fleeting friendliness. The expression now was one of suspicion and resentment.

'Okay, okay, pal,' said John hurriedly, seeing Ronnie's change of mood. A change of mood for Ronnie meant action — violent action, as Lennon knew. He had to keep this junior hood sweet.

'Okay then, let's go,' said Ronnie, sliding past George and Paul to get to the drums. They were a very expensive kit in blue pearl, which had cost poor old Tommy Moore a lot of blood, sweat and tears. He had paid for them on the drip — time payments over many hard months.

Ronnie did a quick slam-bang on the big drum and sat back, grinning. 'Let's go, fellers,' he said, like some bloke he'd seen in the movies. The Beatles groaned inwardly and broke into their first number.

Ronnie, his long arms flailing about, produced a row that could have been achieved just as effectively if he had taken the drum kit and thrown it off the roof of St. Paul's Cathedral. But he was having a ball. He waved his drumsticks at his admiring friends and their hard-faced little tarts. He was an overnight star. These Beatles were good guys, after all. Maybe he would become their permanent drummer.

During a break, while the Beatles sat there shellshocked, Ronnie said to them, 'How's it going, boys? Whaddaya think of my drumming?'

The boys knew if they made any derogatory remarks about Ronnie's prowess he would whistle up his gang of thugs from the dance floor and perhaps the Beatles would have been in no shape to play their next few gigs. There was no escape. It was the worst night the Beatles had ever had. Over the years it stood out in their minds as a beacon of horror, utter and complete horror.

'It was a terrible experience,' Paul told me later. 'What could we do? What started out as a joke announcement guaranteed to placate people because we had no drummer developed into this nightmare. Not John's fault. It just happened that way. There was nothing we could do about it. We asked for a drummer, and Jesus, we got this guy.'

Halfway through the night, Ronnie said to Lennon, 'Look, Skin, I'll be your regular drummer. How about that? If this guy who didn't turn up tonight has packed the job in, you can count on me.'

Lennon's thoughts raced on as to how they could get out of the dilemma with all their bones and contours intact. Ronnie might demand some sort of an answer before the night's gig was over. But . . . Ronnie a regular Beatle? Stone the crows, ye gods.

A little later John rang me at the Jac and told me what the scene was at the ballroom. He sounded really scared. He was almost gabbling with panic.

'Listen, Al . . .'

I could hardly hear him for the noise of the Royal Caribbean Steel Band flooding up the stairs from the basement. It was a big night. Lots of people were coming and going. No more trouble, please.

'Shout up, John, I can hardly hear you. It's the band down below. Speak up . . .'

Lennon's voice came back. Even above the din I could detect his fear. Most unlike the bold Lennon, fearless boy that he usually was.

'Al, Al, listen. You gotta come over to the Grosvenor Ballroom — quick, right away. There could be a lot of trouble here with one of the gang leaders.'

'Christ, John, you can handle all that.'

Lennon had been brought up to look after himself in the violent playground of teenage Liverpool and Merseyside.

'No I can't, I can't. There's this bloke here and he thinks he's going to become a Beatle.'

'Steady on, John, what are you babbling on about? Be a Beatle. Which guy is going to be a Beatle? Who the hell is it . . .?'

'Well, with Tommy not here, I thought it would be a good idea to mention the fact in case anyone got stroppy about there not being a full group. You know how bloody hard they can be over here . . .'

'Yeah, yeah, go on, go on, John. What's all this about some other feller being a Beatle?'

'I announced from the stage that as we were short of a drummer, if there was anyone in the place who fancied . . .'

I was way ahead of John Lennon. He'd put his big Scouse foot right in it. You don't go around creating situations in a place like the Grosvenor, then the heartbeat of Merseyside *machismo.*

Lennon carried on: '. . . himself as a drummer . . .'

'Yeah, yeah,' I groaned, running on ahead, 'and so there was this great big guy who came forward and he didn't know a drum from a fuckin' hatbox and all night he's been buggin' the Beatles . . .'

'That's right,' said Lennon. 'Now listen, Al, don't hang up. This is serious.'

I motioned to one of my staff to stop making such a noise washing the cutlery. She stopped, hands dripping suds. steam rising in clouds over her head. Beside her, a dozen rashers of bacon were frying in a huge pan, which was permanently on the electric ring, for bacon butties for my night friends.

'Okay, John, carry on, carry on, I'm here.'

'We've only got a few more minutes after this break and then we're finished. But this guy keeps on about he's going to be our permanent drummer. He's the leader of this fucking rat pack here. If we tell him to piss off, he's liable to turn them on to us. We've got other dates here. But we can't come back if we have this sod on our backs, now can we?'

'Yeah, I see your point. What do you want me to do, John? I'm all tied up here.'

'You've gotta come over, Allan, and talk to the guy and straighten him out before we pack up. Just sweet-talk him a bit. Tell him he's got a chance for the job or something.'

Now, I'm no barroom gladiator and I was in no frenzy to deal with a thug who could scare the pants off toughie Lennon. But I couldn't leave my boys to weather the present situation on their own. Perhaps I had better go and placate the gang boss.

As I have already pointed out. I'm five feet nothing and like a comfortable, rich life, with all the trimmings. There is one advantage, though, in being so small — people think twice about hitting me.

'Bloody hell, John. First, Tommy backs out and leaves us high and fucking dry, and now you go and get us in this fucking mess. I'm not pleased by it all, John. I'm not pleased. I've got a

business to run here. You boys bring me in peanuts. I don't know if I can stand all this trouble.'

I was in half a mind to pack the Beatles in there and then. But I couldn't do it. They weren't just another group of struggling musicians. I counted them as my pals, and I couldn't ditch them now. If I did, they might be brought back over the Mersey in an unrecognisable condition.

'Okay, John, do nothing till I get there. Just keep a smile plastered on your face and play the music.'

'Thanks, Allan, you're a pal. Hurry up. As I said, we're due off the stage in a short while. That's when this guy could get nasty. He's had his fun trying to smash Tommy's drums to bits. When that's over, he might set his fucking wolf cubs on us.'

I could almost feel Lennon shudder down the line from the Wirral.

'Ah, come off it, John, it can't be that bad,' I said, trying to pump some sense of proportion or courage into the boy. 'Keep a smile on your face. Never fear, I'll be there in double-quick time.'

'Yeah, well, get your skates on. Jump into that Jag of yours and get on over here. Brother, we need you.'

'I'll be right there, John.'

'Thanks, Al, I won't forget this.'

'No, I'm fucking sure I won't either. What a bloody night. It'll never bloody end.'

I told the staff to carry on the good work and hurried out to my car. I gunned the thing down a back alley used by stumble-bums and winos between Bold Street and Lime Street on the way to the mouth of the Mersey tunnel. I had maybe an inch of clearance on each side. If I got through there with the Jag's paintwork intact, I'd be dead lucky.

The headlights knifed through the blackness. If anything was in the way, there would be an awful mess, with me in the middle.

The fucking Beatles. Shit. Trouble. Nothing but trouble.

Jeeezus H. Christ! A drunk staggered out of a doorway and literally hurled himself beneath the car. My hands froze solid on the wheel. It all happened so quickly I didn't even have the time to take my foot off the gas pedal.

The thump when I hit him — I waited for it. No thump. No

body flying through the air. No blood drenching the windscreen. Nothing. I hit the brake pedal and the car skidded to a halt at the end of the alley.

I flung open the car door and walked back, my heart thumping. I was sure I would find the poor stiff's body in a broken heap. Not a sign of the guy.

Then I heard a slight scuffle in a doorway.

'Who's there? Are you okay? Come on out.' At least the bum was capable of movement.

I went back to the car and brought a flashlight. I shone it in the doorway. There he lay, flat on his back, his eyes wide open, fixed in a terrible stare. He had a bottle of cheap wine in one hand and a fag in the other.

'Okay, mate?' I couldn't see any blood.

The pathetic heap spoke: 'You nearly fucking ran me down. Missed me by a fucking inch.'

Missed him. Thank the Lord for that. I breathed easy again.

I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out a couple of bob.

'Here, old friend, buy yourself a drink.'

He put his ciggie in his mouth and reached out his shaking hand. I could have kissed the filthy old bugger.

I ran back down the alley and leapt into the car. I made the Grosvenor in no time flat. On the way I reckon I touched the ton in the tunnel. Luckily there were no tunnel police around.

By the time I got to the ballroom, the Beatles were finished for the night. I walked in through the rear door. The smell of a dance hall — sweat, booze, cheap perfume, tobacco, disinfectant and urine — hit me like a wall. The Beatles were backstage packing their gear, surrounded by a villainous pack of teenagers with their boss, the budding drummer, in the middle. Boy, did he look mean.

'Hello, boys,' I croaked, trying to smile and put a brave face on things. I could feel the tension, the fear in the air. John had been right. This guy wore menace like his very own brand of after-shave.

'Oh, hello,' I said to Ronnie after Lennon introduced us. I stuck my hand out. Ronnie looked down at me. 'You their manager?' He ignored my tiny paw.

'That's right. Allan Williams. The Beatles' manager. I believe you gave a helping hand here tonight?'

'That's right. Me and the Beatles. Did all right, didn't I boys?'

'Sure, sure,' chanted the Beatles. 'You sure did, Ronnie.'

'Thanks a lot, Ronnie,' I said, trying to maintain a hail-fellow-well-met tone, though I felt more like hail-gorilla-well-met.

'How did you learn to play the drums, then?' I struggled on. 'What a stroke of luck you were here tonight.'

'Yeah,' said Ronnie, 'it was, wasn't it?'

With that kind of luck, you could struggle through life. But only just.

'Marvellous,' I said, watching the Beatles pack up their gear. They seemed to be taking for ever about it. Big Mac, their van driver and my bouncer, was there. He was a handy lad with his fists, but he was one alone. The wolf pack would have cut him to ribbons if he had raised a finger. Even before he raised a finger.

One of the cottage industries on Merseyside at that time was the making of personal weapons. Most of the lads worked at places like Cammell Laird, the big shipbuilders, and they had all the materials to hand. Ronnie's boys were, no doubt, all tooled up with knives, razors, bicycle chains wrapped around their waists and homemade knuckle dusters tucked in their pockets. They were kitted out for war.

'Come on then, lads,' I said. 'We've got to be going.'

I helped them out with their instruments. We got to the car park and stowed the stuff into Big Mac's van. Ronnie and his boys sniffed round like a gang of shabby tigers with a piece of old meat. They could have gone into the attack at any minute.

'What about it, then?' said Ronnie, putting his huge red fist on my skinny little arm

'What about what, Ronnie?' The Beatles were getting into my car. We were an inch from danger.

'You're their manager. You just said so.' Ronnie pushed his big square head close to my face. He had bloodshot, bulging green eyes with a crazy animal gleam in them. His breath smelled of some foul mixture of alcohol. I couldn't help myself. I recoiled in horror. His sausage fingers tightened on my arm. The circulation began to pump to a standstill.

'You know – what about taking me on, then?'

'What? As the Beatles' drummer?' For one stupid second I

felt the urge to scream something like 'Fuck off, you big ape' and make a dash for the car. Ronnie would have brought me down like a fleeing antelope.

'Look,' I said, putting my hand on the door of the Jag, 'you know our regular drummer, Tommy Moore, is not with us tonight. We don't know what's going to happen in the future. He might come back. He's a working lad like yourself,' said I, trying to get on a matey footing.

'Yeah, well if he doesn't turn up, you can always get me here. I'll stand in for you, mate.'

'Don't think we're not grateful.' It seemed we might get out in one piece. 'Tell you what. The Beatles are playing here again next week. If we haven't got another drummer by then, you can sit in with the boys. How about that?'

Fear drove me into babbling such a damned stupid thing. One of the youths was tapping the bonnet of my car with a metal object. No doubt his personal weapon, which he was dying to employ on someone's flesh.

'Okay, then,' said Ronnie. He waved his hand, dismissing us from his domain. We'd made it.

I dived into the car. 'Bye bye, Ronnie,' we screamed with relief.

Ronnie stood there peering into the car.

'See ya,' he said.

'Bloody hell,' said Paul on the way back. 'That was a close thing. That guy eats people for supper.'

George: 'He can't play drums for toffee. He just wanted to smash 'em up. Poor old Tommy's kit.'

Stuart: 'You did a bloody good job there, Al. Getting us out in one piece. We won't forget you for that. Will we, boys?'

'We certainly won't.'

'You bet.'

'You're a bloody hero, Al.'

'I thought you weren't going to come over, Al,' said John. He leaned forward from the back seat, staring at the road in front of us.

'What? Leave you in the lurch? You know me better than that, John. Christ, boys, do you think I'd do a dirty trick like that when there's a thug like Ronnie about?'

'Nah — we know you, Al.'

'True blue,' said another.

Stuart: 'What a hell of a name for a bastard like that — Ronnie. Still, I suppose he has a dear old mum who loves him.'

'That I doubt,' said Paul. 'People like that don't have mums. They just get quarried from solid granite.'

We all had a good laugh and I had a sudden thought.

'Listen, boys, I know it's been a hell of a night and we are all bloody tired, but what about having another go at Tommy? Trying to get him back?'

The Beatles groaned. They had had a hectic night and were looking forward to a cup of coffee and a bacon butty in the warmth and comfort of the Jac.

'Ah, come on, Al, have a bleedin' heart.'

'We're all in, Allan.'

'Shit.'

'Balls to Tommy.'

'Now come on, lads, let's be sensible. Tommy is a bloody good drummer. Do you know any as good as him? Come on now. Think about it.'

They thought about it and moaned. Out through the other side of the Mersey Tunnel, I turned the nose of the Jag towards the Garston Bottle Works. There were no objections.

John said, 'This is his last fucking chance. If the prick doesn't come with us tonight, that's it, we've obviously parted company. We'll have to look somewhere else for a drummer. We can't keep calling up to the bloody bottle works and pleading with Tommy every bloody night. We got pride too, you know.'

'Yeah, that's right, John,' the rest of them agreed.

'So have I,' said I. 'So have I. Let's just give him one more chance.'

We gave Tommy one more chance, but he was adamant. There he was, grimy of face, nearing the end of his shift round about midnight.

'No, boys, that's it.'

I knew the Beatles were now in no mood to plead.

'Okay, Tommy,' I said. 'You know it's the night off on Monday for the Royal Caribbean Steel Band.' The boys stood in for the West Indians on their night off. I paid them between eight and ten quid.

'Yeah — so?'

'Just turn up for them. Will you Tommy? For me?'

Reluctantly, Tommy said, 'Okay. Just that one night. And that's it. I'm sorry, boys, the gig's up.'

We drove off.

Tommy turned up on the following Monday. That was the last time he appeared with the Beatles. It was the last he saw of his expensive drum kit too. To this day, he doesn't know what happened to it.

I saw him recently in Liverpool.

'Allan, what happened to my kit?'

'I don't know, Tommy. Not a clue.'

He told me that he had asked the Beatles about it some time later in their career but the drums were sunk without trace.

Tommy talked about that woman who had torn him away from the Beatles and fame that night.

'We aren't together any more. We were never married. I often told her what a bitch she was. Gave her a crack with the back of my hand too when I recalled how she ruined my bloody career with the Beatles. Just to think I could have been rich now. You gotta laugh though, Allan. I mean, look at you now . . .'

I couldn't laugh. But Tommy takes it all philosophically. The only way, really. It could send you mad otherwise.

'I'd still like to know what happened to those bloody drums though, Allan.'

'Yeah, it's a bleeding mystery, Tommy.'

'D'you think the Beatles took them?'

'Nah.'

'No, I wouldn't think so either. I think Paul played on them a couple of times after I left, mind.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah. Don't know what came of them after that though.'

Tommy Moore, the best drummer the Beatles ever had, looked thoughtful.

We had no more problems about Ronnie at the Grosvenor. Not long after he sat in with the Beatles the place was closed down. The neighbours had complained about the noise and violence.

Big Ronnie, where are you now? Still boasting about the night you were a Beatle, I'll be bound.

CHAPTER TEN

Late night gems and fighting first, dancing second

Always around the Jac in those days was a sprinkling of regulars, sipping coffee and telling jokes. Willy, who specialised in the carpet business, would lounge in the kitchen doorway in his constant camel-hair coat.

'Hi, Al,' he would greet me.

'Hi, Willy, how's the carpet business? You emigrated yet?'

'Nah,' he would grin. 'You know me, Al. That's only for the mug punters.'

He'd take a drag at his ciggie, scattering ash over his mohair suit front. That boy dressed really well.

The emigration crack was a standing joke between Willy and me. He would stay in the city for the rest of his life, no doubt.

If you turned to the pages of the *Liverpool Echo* in those days — you could see Willy's small advert in the 'For Sale' section. It always read the same: 'Priceless Oriental and Middle Eastern carpets for quick sale. Owner must sell. Emigrating in the next few days. Giveaway prices.'

The unsuspecting and greedy reader would run round to the address Willy gave in the ad in double-quick time, pockets bursting with green stuff. Emigrating? In the next few days? Priceless? Must sell? The guy must be desperate for cash.

Willy would be waiting for the mugs at his rented room in Liverpool 8. He would explain that he was broken-hearted about it, but he just had to sell these beautiful carpets. He'd spin a yarn about how his plane or boat reservation had been brought forward, so he just had to sell at that very moment at knockdown prices.

The carpets were a load of old junk, but Willy had a very persuasive tongue. The hype was sufficient to part the mug from his money.

Willy did very well, thank you — mohair suits and camel coats. His 'emigration' was always pending.

Over in another corner of the Jac would be Norman the Watchman. Norman was a very old man with a long nose and grey, pitted skin. He wore a dirty brown raincoat and a greasy felt hat. A cigarette, dribbling and brown, was permanently fixed into one corner of his mouth.

Norman made his loot from buying and selling watches. He bought cheaply from junk shops and sold, after renovation, for a slight profit. He was certainly no con man. Many famous people bought absolute gems of timepieces from him at give-away prices. Don't ask me why or how. Perhaps Norman just had a big heart and liked letting people have nice things. Movie director Ted Kotcheff and internationally known playwright Alun Owen bought goods from Norman. Ted got a beautiful enamelled pocket watch for a ludicrously cheap price.

Late at night when the Jac was quiet, Norman would give his impressions of people like Jimmy Durante and stars of British radio no one remembered. He would stand in the middle of the floor, his ciggie still stuck in the side of his face, and go through his act. Strangers laughed at him. The regulars laughed with him. Norman didn't mind. He was having fun, a nice gentle guy who wouldn't hurt a fly.

This was the era of Bill Haley and the Comets, 'Rock Around the Clock' and *Blackboard Jungle*. Rock'n'roll was synonymous with violence, according to the pundits.

I believe that rock'n'roll did breed trouble and riots. The music brought potentially violent people together and created sexual jealousies. The atmosphere in the tiny municipal-owned dance halls all over Merseyside where the groups played was charged with blatant sex and raw emotions. The music was the catalyst. Wham! With the slightest provocation you had trouble and blood, kicking, gouging, knifings. The groups were often on the receiving end.

The local boys, after watching their girl friends throwing themselves at group members all night long, would tool up and lay an ambush. Between leaving the stage and getting into their transport was the danger period for the groups, and many of them learned to carry on a rearguard action, fighting their way

out of the hall and into the van to make a tyre-screeching get-away.

To girls, the musicians were different, glamorous, exciting, exotic and sexually highly desirable. Quite often girls in their very early teens would jump into the groups' vans for a session of sex before the musicians drove back into town. They wanted sex at that very moment, with any member or all the members of a group. A gang bang was a very common occurrence in the groups' vans.

It was on such a night that Stuart Sutcliffe received the injuries which I believe hastened his death a couple of years later. Stuart was attacked outside Litherland Town Hall, where the Beatles played regularly, and was kicked in the head by a local thug. From then on he complained to me often of severe headaches. Just before he died the pain was so severe and constant he feared for his sanity. I am firmly convinced that if it hadn't been for the toe of a brute's boot at Litherland Stuart would be with us now — as one of the best-known painters in the world.

They were truly violent times. Take Garston Baths, for instance — then known throughout the area as the Blood Baths. Garston is a tough area of Liverpool and the things that went on at the dances there would make your hair curl. The police wouldn't go near the place. They took the attitude that trouble there was endemic. Short of blowing the place up, they believed the best policy was to leave 'em alone and maybe they would kill each other off.

Squads of bouncers were employed at Garston Baths to try and keep some semblance of peace. They wore thick black leather gloves and carried heavy wooden batons. They were armed as their opponents were armed. The teenagers who went to the Blood Baths were not regarded as patrons. They were the enemy.

The local lads took a demonic glee in roughing up the bouncers.

A hop at Garston Baths was a blood sport. Any outsider who turned up for an evening of light entertainment might find himself the star of the night . . . being carried away in an ambulance and wondering what hit him.

The dirtier the fight, the better the local boys liked it. They were highly organised, with generals, lieutenants and ordinary

soldiers. When they went into the dance, they came as tactically prepared as Commandos or Green Berets on a raid into enemy territory. Fighting was first, dancing second.

If the bouncers barred one gang for making trouble, there would be a war conference with the members of a friendly tribe on wasteland or in derelict buildings where final details for the night's activities were worked out.

I saw the results of one of the battle plans. A gang called the Tigers were temporarily barred after one of their soldiers had thrown a dustbin through a window in an excess of boyish enthusiasm. Another gang, known as the Tank because they moved in a solid phalanx, had undertaken to get the barred Tigers into the dance. The Tigers didn't particularly want to dance or even chat up the girls. They didn't even want to listen to the music. They just wanted to get in. Because they had been barred out.

The Tank turned up, bought their tickets and even tried out a few steps with their girl friends. The bouncers relaxed slightly but knew they still had the Tigers to contend with when they attempted to wheedle their way in.

The Tigers arrived at the door carrying all their heavy armaments – bicycle chains, truncheons, knives, razors, steel-capped boots. They didn't try to wheedle their way in. They charged, whooping like a pack of Red Indians.

The bouncers withstood the first assault wave. Though they wavered, their line held bravely.

Then the Tank moved in from the rear. The girls ran screaming out of the path of the Tank as they advanced on the bouncers.

The bouncers, seeing they had been betrayed, that the enemy was not only without but within, heroically turned to meet the new threat. It was total, bloody war.

I watched from the door of a cloakroom with my small Liverpool-Welsh head well down, maintaining a low silhouette. Remember, these kids were only fourteen to sixteen years old. But they were tough as pickled teak. The bouncers, attacked on all sides, laid about them with their batons. The boys produced their weapons, and the blood flowed.

I can still hear the crunch of leather on bone as the boots went in. The sickening sound of batons bouncing off skulls. I

can still see the bright flashes of spurting blood. I saw one boy no bigger than a penny piece go for a bouncer with a knife. The bouncer swung his baton and the boy went down, his face transformed into a mass of blood and splintered nose bone. He screamed as he lay there, thrashing about. Two boys darted forward and picked up their fallen comrade, bundling him out of the maelstrom to safety.

The Tigers and the Tank lost the day. The bouncers put them to flight, but not without casualties among their own numbers.

'Jesus Christ,' said one of the bouncers. 'They're not kids at all. They're fucking monsters. What the fuck will they be like when they're fully grown?'

What indeed? If they were lucky enough to survive into maturity.

I left the dance hall and walked out into the street. Further down the road was a small group of boys standing under a lamp. The boys looked as though they had been among those in the dance hall battle. I crossed to the other side of the road and walked towards my parked car. As I put my key into the car door I heard a boy's voice.

Trouble. Move out fast. Get in the car and away. For some reason I decided not to bolt.

I turned. One of the boys was looking across the road at me.

'Mister, can you come over here and have a look at this?'

'What is it?' I said. I didn't want to get involved – the immediate reaction of a city dweller. Blinkered eyes, blinkered mind.

I walked across the road. There under the lamplight lay a young boy of, say, fourteen. He had long blond hair and angelic features. The light dwelt on his smooth fair skin.

'What's up?'

'We don't know,' said the boy who had called out to me. 'What do you think, mister?'

'He's in a bad state,' I said. 'He's unconscious. You'd better get him to hospital.'

'No,' said the leader. 'The cops always wait for us to take our names.'

I bent down and gently turned the boy's head. My fingers felt something warm and sticky on the back of his head. On examination I found a deep gash at the base of the boy's skull.

'Come on, let's get him into my car. I'll take him to hospital. He's badly hurt.'

'I've told you, mister – we don't go near no hospitals,' said the leader.

'There's nothing I can do then,' I said. The situation could have turned nasty for me. 'I have no medical knowledge. The boy needs expert care. He might die. You don't know what injuries he has. Maybe brain damage. You never know with a gash like that.'

'Okay, mister, if you can't help, you'd better be on your way. Thanks. Okay?'

I didn't want to leave the boy there, but what could I do? The leader of the pack had bid me go. If I had stuck around my body might have been found lying there next morning instead of this young kid's.

'Okay. The best of luck,' I said. I went over to my car and started up the engine. They watched me carefully.

I drove off and then swung back round the block to see what the gang was doing about their injured pal. They had put the boy's body on what seemed to be a door from one of the derelict buildings. They were carrying him down the street like a funeral procession.

I read the papers next day to see if the fight was referred to or if someone had died in hospital. Maybe a young boy of fourteen. Nothing. Strange, doomed boys. There was something classically heroic about them. Young thugs, no doubt. But they had a kind of code. A kind of brutal style.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Woody, me, and the Ritz it was not

Strip clubs were beginning to open up in the provinces. There were a couple in Manchester, but not one in Liverpool. It seemed easy money to me, so I put out a few inquiries as to the best way to go into the business. I don't say I'm proud of having been in the strip business. Then again, in no way am I ashamed.

I decided to go into partnership with a good friend of mine, a West Indian called Lord Woodbine. As a calypso singer back home, he always smoked Woodbines, the cheapest cigarette; hence the title, Lord Woodbine. I referred to him as Woody, as all his friends did. Woody was and is a nice guy, intelligent, happy-go-lucky. I like West Indians. They are always full of fun, friendly and hardworking.

Woody had been on the shebeen scene for some time. He often worked as a barman. He was so popular that customers followed him around to whatever bar he moved to. He possessed a cutlass, which he kept under the counter. If a customer looked troublesome, Woody produced the cutlass and waved it about under the guy's nose. The troublemaker usually calmed down. Woody wouldn't hurt a fly – the cutlass was all for show. But it was some show, and very effective.

We opened up a joint, which we called the New Cabaret Artists, in the Liverpool 8 area. The name sounds quite classy, but it was the usual dingy cellar in the basement of a terraced house. Every other house in the street was either a shebeen or a brothel. This was the Upper Parliament Street area, free and easy. Black and white lived side by side in almost perfect harmony. There was no talk of black or white trash or niggers or whiteys.

It is a very different area now. There has been a mass movement brought about by the rehousing of various segments of the population. These days it is more or less a no go area for whites. The feeling is one of suspicion and tension on both sides

of the colour fence. I find this very sad indeed. It once was a place where the divisions between the colours were blurred. Everyone was coffee-coloured, mentally, you could say.

The strip club did boffo biz straight away. The tired and not-so-tired middle-aged businessmen had been waiting for just this kind of entertainment. The house we used had belonged to a rich cotton-dealing family. Around the front door were crumbling white stone pillars. There were heavy black-painted iron railings facing the street. To get into the strip club you walked around the corner into the side street, pushed open a black iron gate and walked down a dozen stone steps to the single-fronted blue door with the paint peeling off in long brown streaks.

Immediately inside was a table and a book of tickets. Whoever worked on the door gave the visitor a ticket which said he was now a fully-fledged member of the New Cabaret Artists Club. And he had to pay a membership and entrance fee of ten bob (or, in the new pence system, fifty pence). The wankers' fee.

On past the table was a row of hooks for people to hang their coats. Most of the customers preferred to keep them on for reasons I will get round to in a minute.

On the right in the main room (that's a laugh, it was as big as a pocket hanky!) was a bar about six feet long. Woody and I had constructed the shelves and racks to hold the liquor supply. A few coloured lights and a till completed the bar decor.

The walls of the place were a dirty grey. We had half a dozen small round tables for the customers and some spindly-legged chairs. The Ritz it was not.

Most of the customers were of the dirty raincoat brigade — the type who go in the park flashing their hampton at little girls. There were also quite a few big-spending businessmen who came up from the city inflamed by the sight of their secretaries' thighs. These types would get a hard-on watching our girls and then go out into Liverpool 8 looking for whores. The dirty raincoat mob got their pleasure by wanking (jerking off) while the show was in progress. Live and let live. Gather ye rosebuds where ye may.

The girls were of the buxom kind, quite often shopgirls looking for a more glamorous job or housewives making a bit extra to buy groceries. We also got some professional strippers over from Manchester.

For a while I found it highly entertaining to watch the wankers at their pleasures. I could see the raincoats bobbing up and down as their hands went to work inside their pockets. I stared fascinated at the ageing sexpots, their raddled faces ugly and lined in the lights from the stage. The girls slowly stripped to the music of a record player. Many of the men postponed their climaxes until the very moment when the girl on stage removed her last garment — G-string or knickers. You could hear the audience give a collective explosive gasp as they ejaculated. Then they brought their clammy hands out from under their coats to give the girls a big wet hand. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. What a way to get your kicks.

The stage where the girls stripped was roughly seven by seven feet. They had to take great care to stay on it. We got drunks in from time to time who made a grab at the girls if they stepped near the audience. At those times Woody would execute a rapid lunge to get in between the girls and their over-enthusiastic admirers.

'Keep your hands off the girls,' he shouted at such moments of stress.

But most of the audience preferred the girls to stay remote and untouchable. That way they could indulge their sexual fantasies without reality intervening. I think the silent watchers were the worst. You never knew what thoughts were going on in their minds or how many tortured frustrations were at work at that very moment.

The girls were aged anywhere from eighteen to thirty. After thirty they started to show their wrinkles. My customers liked them young. The younger the better. Two of my regulars, Pattie and Jeanine, were practising lesbians. Trouble often broke out when they made advances to a new girl.

The New Cabaret Artists Club. There was nothing new about it, and certainly there was no artistry involved. The girls took their gear off and put their gear back on, to the accompaniment of gasps and groans from the audience: onanism, I believe they call it. Everyone wanks. Everyone fantasises, don't they?

The money rolled in but I never felt the New Cabaret Artists Club was my scene.

Not long after our conversation at the arts ball Stuart took a

part-time job as a corporation garbage collector out at Huyton, on the fringes of Liverpool. His job was to go from door to door heaving garbage bins on to his back, and then dumping the contents into the truck. It was heavy, smelly and nasty work. Highly unpleasant.

He only got a few bob for the job but he wasn't concerned about the pay. When I asked him why the hell he had chosen such a horrible job, he said, 'You meet the ordinary people, Al. They come out of their little homes for a chat and a joke. Surprising the types you meet. How happy some of them are, although they haven't got a couple of pennies to rub together. I love it. It's smelly and dirty but it's the people who move me, Allan.'

When the rest of the Beatles got to know about his part-time job, they jumped in and out of empty dustbins when Stuart was around. I had some pictures of the boys in dustbins but they are long gone.

During this period, Stuart was painting truly marvellous portraits of the people he met on his garbage rounds. They were grotesque and highly coloured. It was difficult to believe that they were the work of such a young boy. No wonder that since his death he has become, in Liverpool at least, almost a James Dean cult figure. He had the sort of personality that made you think the whole fucking world was bleeding to death in his lap.

At this time the Beatles were without a drummer. Tommy Moore was buried for the next ten years working night shift at the bottle works. The boys kicked their heels round the Jac and I frantically searched for a replacement for Tommy. A typical conversation in the Jac would go like this:

George: 'Hey, Al, don't tell us this is the end of the line. We've only just started. Tell us it can't be true.'

'It's all right for you,' said Lennon, 'going up to your fucking sexy strip club every night watching the wankers at work. What about us, Allan?'

Paul: 'How about trying the labour exchange? They might have an out-of-work drummer on their books.'

The Beatles found this very funny. They brightened up for all of one minute.

George: 'Perhaps we could get one of the Royal Caribbean Steel Band to help out?'

'Ah, it's okay, boys. Everything will turn out all right. You'll see. Something or somebody will come along. There must be a drummer in this great big city somewhere who wants to play with the fantastic, the one and only Beatles.'

'Yeah,' they grunted. 'Yeah . . .'

'Well, boys, I gotta go up to the strip club. I'm auditioning a new girl.'

They all screamed with glee. 'Oooohh,' said Lennon, 'can I come and give you a hand, Allan?'

'No, thanks. The girl doesn't need a hand, she needs a job. See ya, tarra then.'

I left them there, miserably staring out into Slater Street on a very grey morning. I had to get a drummer. The Beatles would go to seed if I didn't find one soon.

The new girl was from Manchester. Her name was Shirley and she had gigantic boobs. In contrast, her waist was one of the smallest I have ever seen on a girl of her proportions. She had one of those hour-glass figures which Victorian women achieved by masses of whalebone and will power.

There was just her and me at the club that morning. Shirley had been recommended by a club-owner friend in Manchester. He had warned me that she wouldn't perform without a live band to back her.

'A live band in the New Cabaret Artists Club? You must be joking. If we got a band in here, there wouldn't be any room for the paying customers. This isn't the Savoy. It's a cellar in Liverpool 8. I hope this girl hasn't any big ideas about what she's coming to.'

'Nay, Allan lad, it'll be all right.'

That's how a lot of the older generation of Mancunians talk. Everybody's a 'lad' and they use the centuries-old 'nay' for no. Quite beguiling, and it tends to lull out of-towners into the false impression that they are dealing with a bunch of yobbos — until it's too late. Lovely people, the Mancunians. They make very good lasting friends.

The girl Shirley was standing before me in the deserted strip club.

'Okay,' I said, taking one of the rickety seats and putting it in front of the stage. 'Come onstage and take your gear off. Make it as sexy as you like. The customers here like it really earthy.'

Shirley gave me the lot. She stripped down to the buff. Her breasts were huge but they stood out on their own. She could have burnt her bra any day. No spaniel ears there. The rest of her was equally magnificent. She would do the New Cabaret no harm at all. She might send the customers away mad, but that wasn't my worry.

Halfway through her act she broke off and said, 'I could do this a lot better with music, Allan.'

Here it comes. The big band bit.

'We've got a record player. The other girls like that.'

'I've been used to a band. I work better with a band.'

'Christ,' I said, 'you can see the size of the place. How can we get a band in here? You get a band in, you don't have any room for the customers. I told your old boss that before you came.'

'Yeah?' she said.

I didn't want trouble with this girl Shirley. Her act was very good. She was a star in her field. When she got dressed she asked me if she could have a rum and Coke I went over to the bar and poured her one.

'You not having one?' she asked. 'Keep me company?'

'Nah — it's too early in the day for me. I'll have a Coke on its own.'

'Look, Allan, you might as well get this straight . . .'

Here it came . . .

'. . . I won't go on and dance and take my clothes off to any fucking records. This was the understanding when I told Bert I would come and work for you. I told him I wanted a live band or I wouldn't do it.

'Now I get over here to this crummy dump and I find you've got no fucking band. Now come on, what's it all about?'

So there it was at last. Trouble.

'Oh, for Christ's sake, you must be fucking mad. Look at the place. Look at the size of it. How could we do it? Where would you put the band, you stupid cow?'

You could see by the conversation we were getting on very intimate down-to-earth terms.

She gulped her rum and Coke. When she put back her head her tits stuck out like train buffers. She was built, really built. She made my other girls look like something out of Belsen. I needed another girl badly. One had just run out on me. Girls

like Shirley were rare. In the strip business, in those days, you had to take some real dogs.

'There we are,' said Shirley. 'No band, no strip. You get it? No band, no strip. It's just not me.'

'Jesus Christ, anyone would think you were Gypsy Rose Fucking Lee or someone — '

She cut in, 'Don't give me any of that crap, Allan. I've got my fucking pride.'

'Boy oh boy, you can say that again.'

She had spunk and spirit. Qualities I admire. At that moment I thought of my boys the Beatles kicking their scuffed heels back in the Jac, growing fat off bacon butties and no work. They wouldn't need a drummer to back Shirley. Anyway, who would be taking any notice of a band when Shirley was exposing her equipment?

'All right, leave it with me, Shirley. I'll see what I can do.'

'You'd better do more than that. Just get a band or I don't go on.'

'Okay, okay,' I said. 'Leave it with me. I'll get you a band. You see if I don't.'

She picked up her gear in a big canvas bag and walked out. I watched her go. From any angle she was a knockout.

Would the Beatles do it? Would Lennon beat my ears back for even suggesting it? Play in this dump? What the hell, they'd played in worse.

I drove back to the Jac. They were still sitting there. I decided on the soft sell.

'Coffee all round on the house for the Beatles,' I told the girl in the kitchen.

I went back and sat with the lads. By then Stuart had turned up from his job. His clothes smelled of garbage.

'Christ, what a pong, Stuart! That's a hell of a job you've got. Surely there must be some better way of getting round to meet the ordinary people?'

Stuart writhed with embarrassment and Lennon added his comment, 'Stuart, you don't meet all the best people toting dustbins.'

I steered the conversation away from Stuart.

'Boys, let's look at the facts. You've got no gigs lined up right now and you've got no fucking drummer. Right?'

'Right.'

'True, true, Al.'

'So okay, I've got a nice easy job laid on for you at the strip club.'

'Strip club?' echoed George.

'Whose strip club?' said Paul.

'No, thanks,' added Lennon.

'Allan . . .' said Stuart, not believing his ears.

'No, no, I'm not joking. I'm in a spot. I've got this new stripper and she's a bit peculiar.'

'Peculiar — how?'

'I thought all strippers are fucking peculiar.'

'What's up — she got three tits?'

'Two heads?'

'Come on, boys, listen to me. You'll make a bit of cash. All you have to do is come up at nights to the New Cabaret and play twice for about twenty minutes each time and I'll pay you ten bob a man every night.'

There, I'd put it to them. Got it off my chest. They hadn't lynched me yet.

'Ten bob?'

'You twisting bastard . . .'

'Stone the fucking crows . . .'

'Playing in a strip club . . .?'

'This is the end of the fucking line for the Beatles . . .'

They didn't like the idea.

So I argued. I thought of Shirley. The business she would bring. The mad wankers of Liverpool 8 would beat a path to the ever-open door of the New Cabaret Artists Club. I'd be rich.

The Beatles still didn't like it. I kept on arguing.

'Aw, come on. What else will you do? You've no fucking drummer.'

I kept driving away at the fact that they had no drummer and there were no other engagements lined up for the next couple of weeks.

'Great balls of fire,' said Paul. 'Do we have to do this thing?'

'We don't have to do anything we don't want to,' said Lennon, the bold, assertive boy.

'This can't be happening to us,' put in Stuart.

'Ah well, worse things happen at sea,' said George, using an old Liverpool expression to minimise a disaster in one's life.

They didn't like the idea of ten bob a man. It would keep them in bacon butties and ciggies, I pointed out. What did they want already, Carnegie Hall?

'I tell you what,' said Stuart. 'Let's make it a quid a man.'

'A quid?' I snorted. 'You must be fucking mad. That's way above your price. Balls to that. Why that much?'

'For the bloody indignity,' said Paul. 'For the sheer bloody indignity of it all. That's why, Allan. We'll be playing on Lime Street, busking for the bloody cinema queues next.'

'Okay,' I said, 'I'll try and get you a quid. But Lord Woodbine has a big say in it, you know. He's my partner.'

'Bollocks to Lord Woodbine,' said a Beatle.

'I'll go and see Woody now and see what he says.'

I went round to Woody's place, not far from the Jac. The time was about one in the afternoon. I knocked on the door of the flat. I heard a grunt and pushed open the door. Lord Woodbine was still in bed. He sat up, his fine brown frame glistening in the crack of light that sliced through a gap in the curtains.

'Come on, you cunt,' said I, cheerfully. 'Wakey, wakey. You're not in the Caribbean now. Up. We've got to take a big financial decision.'

'What is it, man?' groaned Lord Woodbine, pushing his knuckles into his sleepy eyes. 'Jesus Christ, I didn't get to bed till dawn.'

Lord Woodbine was a very busy, very virile coloured gentleman at that time.

I sat on the edge of the rumpled bed. There was another body in there. I felt it stir.

'Don't pay no attention,' said Lord Woodbine, patting the shape under the blankets. 'Go right ahead. What is it, Allan?'

He reached out to a chair by the bed, fumbled about and lit a cigarette. It smelled like ordinary tobacco.

'You know I've just been auditioning this new girl from Manchester?'

'Yeah, man. What she like? She got a good body?'

'The greatest.'

'Good man, Allan. Good man. When she going to start? We're a girl short. We need her.'

'That's the snag, Woody. Maybe she won't start.'

'What you mean, man? She maybe won't start? She sick or somethin'?'

'Nah, she ain't sick.'

'What then?' Lord Woodbine puffed on his ciggie and gasped and wheezed.

'She wants a band backing her.'

Lord Woodbine was in the process of taking another lungful of tobacco. I thought he was going to bust a gut. He gasped and spluttered, ending in a chest-heaving paroxysm that seemed would deprive me of my partner in the New Cabaret Artists Club.

When he could get his breath Lord Woodbine said, 'A band? What she want a fucking band for? She ain't singing, is she? All she needs to do is take her gear off and waggle her tits for the customers. What she think this is, the Ziegfeld Follies?'

'Nah, it's just a thing she's got. She says she's always been used to working with a band and she won't go on without one. I tried to talk her out of it but she wouldn't listen.'

'Tell her to fuck off,' said Woody. 'We can get by without her.'

'She's a great-looking girl, Woody. She'd bring in a lot of trade.'

Then I told him about the Beatles.

'The Beatles? They're a fucking rock'n'roll group,' said Woody. 'Anyway, where would they play? There ain't room.'

'We could just about get them on that stage I think, Woody. It's worth a try. I told them we'd give them ten bob a man a night.'

'Jesus Christ,' said Woody. 'Bang go the bloody profits.'

He was always a cautious guy with money, Lord Woodbine.

'Steady on,' I said. 'They want a quid each.'

'A quid?' Lord Woodbine looked as though he was going to have another seizure.

'For Christ's sake, put that fucking ciggie out – bloody coffin nails.'

Lord Woodbine was adamant. The Beatles, he said, weren't worth more than ten bob a man a night.

'Christ,' he said, 'who ever heard of the Beatles?'

'That's not the point, Woody. We need some music or we lose this girl Shirley.'

'Okay, Allan. Ten bob a man. Bloody robbers, that's what I think. Bloody robbers. We'll both be in the bankruptcy court over this lot.' Lord Woodbine liked to heighten the smallest proceedings with a tinge of drama.

'Okay, Woody, see ya.' I reached over and patted the shape by Lord Woodbine's side.

'See ya, Allan,' Lord Woodbine lowered himself back down under the clothes, stubbing his cigarette out in a bedside ashtray.

'Shut the door quietly on your way out, man. I'se very fragile today and I need some more sleep. Go quietly, man . . .'

'You lazy cunt,' said I cheerfully. I walked out, hammering my feet loudly on the floor. I slammed the door as hard as I could. I heard a howl of protest from Lord Woodbine as he tried to get back to sleep.

Back at the Jac, the Beatles were waiting.

'I'm sorry, lads. Woody says he can't pay more than ten bob a man a night. Now what do you say?'

'The robbing bastard.'

'We won't do it.'

'It's a fucking outrage.'

'It's better than nothing.'

They would do it, they said, under sufferance. But I had to get them something decent, a good gig, soon.

'Yeah,' I said.

I helped them carry their kit up to the New Cabaret Artists Club. They hadn't seen the place before. There it was — empty, dingy, smelling of urine from the gents. There were cigarette ends ground into the floor and dried booze rings on the unpainted tables. From somewhere in back of the bar we could hear a steady drip of escaping water. A heavy truck went by in the street and the cellar responded by vibrating slightly.

The spangled curtains behind the stage badly needed cleaning. They were threadbare and studded with one or two sequins. Bits of material hung from them in woebegone shreds. A discarded pair of panties was draped on a chair under the awning that passed as a changing-room for the girls.

'We've come a long fucking way, Allan . . . a long fucking way, in no time.' That was Paul speaking.

I knew what he meant. It was an awful heartaching moment.

But we were young. There would be better days. I looked at the four boys standing there. They believed in themselves, they believed in their music, they believed they would one day produce a great sound. Had I let them down by bringing them to this grotty place of sexual fantasies?

'It's not for ever, boys,' I said, putting a cheerful face on things. 'Mark it down to experience. That's the way to look at it.'

'There are some experiences you can do without, Allan.'

'Yeah, like this place for one . . .'

'What a dump . . .'

'Ah well, let's get the gear set up.'

Shirley was well pleased. She fancied the Beatles like mad.

'Who is that nice boy with the bony face?' she said on the first night, indicating George Harrison, who was standing at the bar drinking an orange juice. The Beatles were about to open at the New Cabaret Artists Club and I had introduced them to Shirley, but she couldn't remember the names.

'That,' I said, 'is George. George Harrison. He's a nice boy and he is much too young for you, Shirley. Don't go leading him astray.'

'He looks gorgeous enough to eat,' she said, making smacking obscene noises with her fat plummy lips.

'He's too young for you, Shirley,' I repeated.

'They're never too young,' she said, eyeing George, who was trying to hide behind his orange juice. 'If they're big enough, they're old enough,' she said, using a well tried and tested army phrase.

Paul took over on drums and the boys played some slow tunes like 'Summertime' and 'Begin the Beguine' and once they even tried 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' just to keep the ball rolling. It didn't matter what they played. Shirley was delighted to have her backing band, the customers were mad about Shirley and everyone was happy — except the Beatles.

Shirley went on twice a night. You could hardly see the Beatles for the stripper. The boys' eyes popped out of their heads when this vision of superlative femininity repeatedly rushed by. Quite often their music faded away to a whisper or ended up in chaos and confusion as the sight became too much for the boys. When you are trying to play 'It's a Long Way to

Tipperary' with a mound of female flesh jiggling past your nose continuously, some sort of strain arises (I am being exact in my choice of words).

Shirley was engaged for only a week but it was funny while it lasted. Business was good. There was no shortage of virile middle-aged men in the city, and word soon got around that there was a new girl called Shirley who was spectacularly well endowed.

Despite the free sex show, the Beatles didn't ever get to like the situation. Some of the regular customers didn't like the Beatles being around either. It put them off their stroke.

One of the blokes who had been a steady customer since we first opened the doors took me aside one night while Shirley was offstage.

'Look here, Allan,' he said, grabbing my arm. I tried to pull my arm away from his thin knobbly heads. I didn't like these wankers to get on too intimate terms.

'Yeah,' I said. 'What is it?'

'It's like this. Now you know me, Allan . . .'

I didn't like him calling me Allan. It was too close for comfort. All very well catering for these people, but calling me Allan was a bit of a liberty.

'. . . I like my bit of fun. I don't do anyone any harm. Come here and get my bit of pleasure . . .'

'Yes, yes . . . get it out . . .'

Oh God, I thought, what an unfortunate choice of words. The old wanker, of course, got me wrong. He gave me a strange look. A funny glint came into his boodshot eyes.

'Oh no, Allan. I never do that. You know me better than that.'

'No, no, I didn't mean that, what I meant was — have you got something to tell me? Get it off your chest.' No matter what you said to these blokes, they could find a double meaning.

'What about these lads, the Beatles?'

What was he? Some sort of pervert? Don't tell me he was fancying my boys? I put a scowl on my face.

'We're having none of that,' I said. 'This is a respectable strip club . . .'

He didn't see my point. 'They put me off, Allan . . .' There he went again, getting too damned close. '. . . I can't concentrate

on the show. There they are twanging and banging away at that peculiar music and all the time I'm trying to watch the lovely girls. It's too damn noisy. I mean, this is a strip club, not a bleeding dance hall, Allan. Can't you do something about it? We don't want these Beatles. I'm sure they're good boys, but they are not in the spirit of the thing.'

'Don't worry, old cock' — he winced at the term — 'they'll soon be gone. They're only here because Shirley won't perform without a live backing. She's funny that way. It'll be back to normal by next week.'

The show started up again.

'Oh, thank goodness for that, Allan. Praise the Lord . . .'

Praise the Lord. I ask you. He scrambled back into his seat, anxious not to miss anything.

The Beatles struck up 'Ain't She Sweet?' in a half-hearted way and Shirley, the lovely girl from Manchester, came back on. I'd be sorry to see her go, I thought. She's shaken the place up a bit.

After the show the Beatles would sit around with Woody and me and knock back a few Scotch and Cokes. They'd get quite pissed and then play some real rock'n'roll just for Lord Woodbine and me.

'We'll be fucking glad when this lot's over, Allan.'

'Okay, lads, quit whining. It's a job, ain't it?'

'Some fucking job . . .'

'We gotta play all this square music . . .'

'Gis another fucking Scotch and Coke, your Lordship . . .'

'Gis' is a Liverpool abbreviation for 'give us', as in 'Gis this day our daily bread . . .'

Lennon said, 'What a pack of disgusting old men, Allan. Fancy you running a place like this. I thought you were a respectable kind of bloke.'

'Don't go spreading it around, John, that I'm in the strip business. I don't want it generally known.'

'Yeah?' said Lennon. 'And why not? Ashamed of it, are you then, Allan?'

'I'm out to make a few bob but I'm not particularly mad about being in this kind of lark. Do you blame me, John?'

'Not really. I wouldn't like to be in it myself. You gotta live though, Allan.'

For her last act Shirley went berserk. Strippers in those days didn't go in for all the erotic make-believe sex that is commonplace now, so Shirley was a kind of pioneer in her field. For her very last act she made love to the floor. The wankers had seen nothing like it. Perhaps it rather spoiled their fun because they liked to provide their own fantasies. Shirley was going too far.

It was certainly too much for one of our customers. He tried to fling himself into the act with Shirley and had to be restrained by Lord Woodbine, who vaulted over the bar.

They tussled among the spindly tables and chairs, reeling back and forth among the audience, neither one getting the upper hand. After a few bottles and glasses had been smashed, Lord Woodbine pushed the mad sex fiend up against the bar where he kept the cutlass. Then he let the guy go for a second and dashed round the bar, while Shirley went on with her grunt-and-groan performance. Lord Woodbine emerged wielding his ready blade. The guy took off into the night swearing he'd be back and fix Woody all right.

'Christ, Woody, he was a mean guy,' I said. 'You better watch out. He looks like he might just be back and try and do you in.'

'Nah,' said Lord Woodbine. 'Those guys are all talk. When they threaten they never do anything. It's the quiet guys you have to watch.'

Shirley finished her act to thunderous applause from the wankers. They'd hardly noticed the Lord Woodbine *versus* Angry Customer contest.

The guy did come back a couple of nights later — with a gun with which he attempted to end the life of Lord Woodbine.

I was on the door handing out the tickets when it happened. Suddenly this guy with wild eyes presented himself and asked for a ticket.

He was a big fat geezer with slick greasy hair, very blotchy skin and black eyes like a pirate's. He had on a double-breasted suit. I noticed he kept one hand in the pocket of his jacket.

I recognised him immediately.

'Sorry, mate, you can't come in.'

He stuck his chin out. 'Whaddaya mean I can't come in? What's up?'

'You know what's up. You were in here the other night trying to make trouble. You're barred . . .'

'Balls to that,' he said and pushed past me into the main room.

I shouted to Woody, who was serving drinks behind the bar, 'Watch out, Woody, here comes trouble.'

I threw myself on to the guy's back, but I was so small he just shrugged his big fat shoulders and flung me off. I landed on my back. As I looked up I saw him pull something from his jacket pocket. It was a gun. Three loud explosions followed as he started popping off shots at Lord Woodbine behind the bar. The scene looked like a fairground shooting alley.

The shots hit the bottles and glasses. Lord Woodbine kept his head down behind the bar and didn't get hurt. There was a back door which gave access to a basement area.

'Out the door, Woody. Out the back door,' I yelled. The guy turned on me with the gun. By this time I had got back on my feet.

'You, you little bastard,' he said. He pointed the gun at me and pulled the trigger.

There was a click. The guy looked down at the gun in surprise. The thing hadn't gone off. I couldn't believe my luck.

The guy turned back to the bar again. By this time all the early arrivals were crowded at the other end of the room by the stage, taking it all with amazing calm. Perhaps they thought it was part of a new cabaret act I was putting on.

The gunman pumped another couple of shots into the bar, the gun apparently back into full working order. Then he swaggered out, waving the gun, and we heard his feet going up the stone stairs on to the street.

'Okay, folks, the show's over.'

I knew no one would tell the police. The police were the last people strip club customers wanted to fraternise with. Now, how about Lord Woodbine?

I went round the bar and shouted Woody's name out loud. No response.

'Woody, it's me, it's me.' It was pitch black. Couldn't see my hand before my eyes, let alone a dark-skinned friend like Lord Woodbine. Then I heard Lord Woodbine's voice coming from six feet above me.

'That you, Allan?'

'Sure it's me.'

I saw a pair of shoes on a level with my nose. They belonged to Lord Woodbine, who was standing on a window ledge. I helped him scramble down.

'Good job that bastard didn't follow me through here, Allan. There's no way out.'

Suddenly we both began to shake like leaves. Delayed shock. We went back into the bar and had large drinks.

After the Beatles finished their week backing Shirley I looked for more work for them. They got a few gigs but the story was always the same: 'When do we get another drummer, Allan?'

Search me. It was a bad year for drummers. Perhaps it was something in the bread, the times, the weather, but drummers there were not.

You can take just so much of people like the dreaded wankers night after night. Lord Woodbine didn't seem to mind, though. He loved talking to the strippers. The squalid atmosphere made no impression on his bouncy, buoyant, sun-filled West Indian soul. God, I wish I'd been born West Indian. It's like walking around with your very own happy-times survival kit strapped on your back. Those people know how to live. Perhaps it's because they know such back-breaking poverty from the day they're born. Times can't get worse for them, only better.

I heard on the grapevine that the busies — busybodies, bobbies, police — were interested in the New Cabaret Artists Club. They intended to raid us. I had plenty of friends among the city force. I don't mean I was paying anybody. No, they were just friends I met around the watering places in town. I'd buy them a drink, they'd buy me a drink. No strings attached. So I got the warning in good time. I told Lord Woodbine that it was time to move on. The show was over. We'd made a small amount of money.

And it wasn't my cup of tea really. The charge would have been keeping a disorderly house — or something like that. It wouldn't matter. I would have a record. And that I could get by without. So I thanked my tip-off pal in the police force, bought him a large drink and set about getting rid of the joint.

I put an advert in the local paper, the *Liverpool Echo*: Club for sale. Great business opportunity for go-ahead promoter.

That sort of thing. I didn't expect a great mad rush to the door of the New Cabaret Artists Club, but the day after the ad appeared I got a visit from the local Mister Porn himself — the original dirty old man.

Mister Porn was roughly the shape of a pear. His clothes were stained and a pair of muddy brown braces peeped out from his waistband. He was fat, old and lecherous. He emanated evil the way a slaughterhouse stinks of blood. He had a huge head, no neck, dry grey skin pitted with holes, and thick wet pendulous lips which he continually dabbed with a snuff-coloured rumpled hanky. His breath stank of decay. I wanted to vomit in his presence.

Pretty he was not, but he had money. Lots of it. And he wanted to buy the New Cabaret from the moment he set his muddy brown eyes on it.

He ran, among other things, a dirty-book shop and a blue cinema. (The blue cinema was a movable feast. To keep one jump ahead of the law, it was located in a different place every couple of nights.) The strip club was right up his street. It would be another scabby corner in his porno empire.

Why did I get so uptight about porn, I wonder? There is no logic to it — it's just another form of pleasure. My strict upbringing, I suppose.

Mister Porn didn't argue about the price and he didn't even ask about the legal situation. So Lord Woodbine and I forgot to tell him that the police were sniffing about and there could be a raid any day. After all, Mister Porn had been handling the law all his awful life.

When Mister Porn handed over the money I had enough to just about pay off some outstanding debts. I was glad to get rid of the joint. We'd had some laughs. The Beatles had had some laughs. Lord Woodbine and I had nearly got our durn heads blown off . . . fun, fun, fun.

Lord Woodbine immediately went out and got himself a second hand Cadillac. He made the down payment and drove around town with a big cigar stuck in his laughing face. Night after night he parked outside the Adelphi, then the poshest hotel in Liverpool. He sat there with the hood down, rain or snow, so that people could see the great Lord Woodbine. Mister Big Success. You gotta laugh.

Lord Woodbine also opened another club. This time it was strictly booze and birds. No strippers. Just a place where guys could pick up gals. Its grandiloquent name was: The New Colony Club: proprietor, Lord Woodbine. The Beatles were to go down big there.

The New Colony Club was a shebeen in Berkley Street. It was surrounded on all sides by other shebeens, brothels and gambling houses. Berkley Street was the vice centre then. There you could have any sort of a good time you wanted and you wouldn't get rolled, knifed, cheated or ripped off in any shape or form. You got what you paid for. It wasn't cheap, but it was efficient.

Upstairs in the New Colony Club was a tiny bar in what had been the front room of the house. In the cellar was the dance floor, with another bar.

The people who went there were businessmen, sailors and whores. The businessmen were mostly fat and frustrated, and after a couple of minutes jogging around the floor they departed for the nearest sleazy room where they could pay their money and partake of sex with the girl of their choice. The girl was back in the cellar looking for another customer in a matter of minutes.

The Beatles looked on all this in wonder. They sat and played their instruments at one end of the small cellar. There wasn't even a stage. Lord Woodbine paid them two pounds among the four of them for one afternoon's work. Peak business was done during the day at that kind of place.

When the Beatles packed up for the afternoon they would hang around chatting up the girls and taking the piss out of the fat businessmen. They loved the sleazy rumbustiousness of the place. They thought maybe it was like Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

At night they did a few gigs for me. After their gig they went back up to Lord Woodbine's place. After the customers had gone, the Beatles often drank far into the night with Lord Woodbine. Their tipple was the inevitable Scotch and Coke. They drank plenty of it. They thought the New Colony Club was fascinating, a real gas. They couldn't stay away. Why, they even slept there sometimes.

When the last drunk had gone off with the last whore, when

even nonstop Berkley Street had closed its bloodshot eyes and decided to call it a day for a couple of hours, the weary Beatles bedded down in the basement on the tables and chairs, amid the stink of booze and sweat. Lord Woodbine provided a few blankets among them. The Beatles nestled into the womb of the red-light district and slumbered.

The same old game would start again in a few short hours, when the sun's first rays hit the tall spire of the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, a stone's throw away, looking out over the grey snake of the Mersey.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sahara nights and the Bootle Bull

These were days of great frustration for the Beatles and for me. We all felt that the future would be rosy, that it would bring excitement and some measure of success. But the future wasn't now. We had the impatience of youth coupled with the cheerful feeling that nothing was important enough to worry about for very long.

But at times I got into severe depression. These depressions would manifest themselves in the way I drove my Jag.

I have always been mad about driving. I can relax completely behind the wheel of a car. But this doesn't mean to say my passengers can. In fact, they have been known to scream with fear, calling on the Lord to witness their predicament in words like 'Dear God' . . . 'Jesus H. Christ' . . . and 'Allan, you crazy bastard, you nearly killed that guy'.

It was my habit when in a black mood to drive my car at great speeds all over Lancashire. My drives were nearly always in the early hours of the morning. Some of the police forces got to know me very well.

On one occasion I set off for a drive into the Southport area, which is just along the coast from Liverpool. Going along the dock road out past the Pier Head, I touched a hundred and twenty miles an hour. My car was a special souped-up model, and with a following wind I could get a hundred and forty out of it, providing no cops were around. I thought there were no cops around this morning. Dear God, was I wrong.

I suppose I must have had a few too many drinks. Otherwise I would have detected that I was being pursued by a flock of police cars from three forces.

I went through a red light at Bootle on the outskirts of Liverpool. A police car got on my tail there but couldn't catch me. Going through Crosby and Blundellsands, lovely little places on

the coast midway to Southport, I attracted the attentions of two more cars. I did a quick loop back just before Southport and headed towards Liverpool. I intended to have a pie and chips and a cup of tea at an all-night café frequented by the late-night people on Lime Street.

When I screeched to a halt outside the café, hungry for my pie and chips, five police cars converged on me like something out of a mad mad mad movie. I couldn't make out what the trouble was. One of the cops recognised me.

'Bloody hell. I should have known it was some crazy bastard like you, Allan.'

'Hello, hello,' I said with my usual good cheer. 'What's up, chaps?'

This pal of mine on the Liverpool city force explained to me that I had been chased by three police departments for speeding and dangerous driving. What was I going to do about it? Well, I wasn't going to plead guilty, I told him.

They took me off to the police headquarters in Liverpool and charged me with speeding and careless driving. They could have made it dangerous driving, but I put on my big 'what-did-I-do-wrong-officer?' act. I can do this pretty well. I get plenty of practice, the way I live, even now.

I had a plan to beat the rap. I knew I was a nervous kind of guy and I had been under pressure from various directions. So I went along to my doctor, and without mentioning my recent involvement with the police, told him how I felt. He gave me a lot of tests, asked me a lot of questions.

'Nervous exhaustion, Allan,' he said. I could have kissed the guy.

He gave me a prescription for some pills and instructed me to take it easy.

I said, 'Look, doc, I'm in the middle of a business deal, I'd like to take a couple of days off to rest up. But these are tough types I'm dealing with. Could you give me a note to the effect that I'm suffering from nervous exhaustion? I'll show it to them and they'll let me off the hook.'

So my lovely doctor wrote out a note. I went to court and showed the magistrate this document. As a result I got off with a fine and a black mark on my licence.

I subsequently lost my licence for six years and I don't think

I'll ever drive again. Something happens to me behind the wheel of a powerful car. I don't know what it is, I just kind of feel fangs grow . . . Perhaps it's 'cause I'm only a little guy.

Sometimes I and some of the groups would spend a night out on the sand dunes at Blundellsands. Blundellsands is a snooty area on the outskirts of town, where a lot of cotton brokers and shipping people live in large 1920s Great Gatsby mansions fronted by large lawns, summer houses and ponds. Peacocks strut about on the grass. There is the sound of cut-glass upper-crust English accents in the air. Not the sort of place for us scruffs.

The beach was our scene. After the pubs, clubs and coffee bars — including the Jac — had closed, we would pile into a fleet of cars (old bangers, some of them) and speed out to Blundellsands.

One night a fog came down very quickly. As we huddled round a beach fire, we felt we were in the middle of the Sahara, miles from anywhere. Through the fog came the sound of the Bootle Bull. This is the foghorn that alerts ships coming down the channel from the sea. Its mournful notes echoed about us and the driftwood we had thrown on the bonfire hurtled sparks upwards, which soon disappeared in the yellow bank of fog.

I said, 'Come on, lads, this is too bloody spooky for me. Put the car headlights on.'

We made a circle of the cars and switched on all the headlights. The scene became more cheerful and some of the boys got their guitars out. In the middle of Blundellsands beach, the Great Gatsby area, they plonked away at their rock'n'roll.

On one occasion the racket we were making became such a nuisance to the local residents that one of them came out of his house in his dressing-gown. He was carrying a shotgun. Not a pleasant guy. Ex-Army rugger type with a wiry body and a thick black moustache. Yellow boozy eyes and purple-red-welted skin. A bad person to cross.

He came down to the campfire waving his gun about. Everything stopped — as things are likely to when a shotgun is waved an inch from your nose. As usual, it was me who piped up.

'What's up, mister? What's the gun for?'

'None of your lip,' he snarled, a hundred years of born-to-

command behind his voice. He carried on: 'You bloody people' — he pronounced it 'bladdy' — 'think you can come here night after night waking us up with your bloody awful racket and get away scot-free. Revving your damned engines, tinkering with your guitars. What do you think this is? A bloody pleasure beach?'

'No pleasure with you around, mister,' said a voice from the circle of rock'n'rollers.

This could get out of hand, I thought. Better placate this guy. After all, he was carrying a gun. I didn't want anyone to get hurt.

'Okay, mister,' I said, 'we get your point. But let's not be nasty. We're not bloody people, as you so describe us. We mean no harm. Okay, we'll keep it a bit quiet. Go on back to bed.'

My speech did nothing to take the heat out of the situation. He waved the gun again.

As I've said before, some of those Liverpool musicians were able to look after themselves in all sorts of unpleasant spots. There was among us a guy called Tod the Bod. He got his nickname because he was a fitness freak who was always throwing weights around and doing press-ups. He was built like the big guy who kicks sand in skinny guys' faces and gets away with it.

'Listen, you.' Tod the Bod stood up. He was six feet one and looked a mile wide.

Our visitor took a step back, frightened. 'Don't you threaten me,' he said. He raised the shotgun and pointed it towards Tod the Bod. This didn't scare Tod. He leapt forward and ripped the gun from the guy's hands. At the same time he gave the bloke a push which sent him sprawling. Tod snapped open the breech. It was loaded all right. Tod pointed the gun into the air and fired off the cartridges and then flung the weapon back at the guy, who was still lying on the ground with his mouth open.

'Now fuck off,' said Tod. 'If we see you round here again, I'll stick that gun where it hurts.'

The guy picked up his gun and ran off shouting, 'We'll see about you lot, we'll have the law on you . . .'

His voice faded into the distance. That broke the party up for the night and we drove back into town.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Everett, Otto, Bones and Slim. Did you say Hamburg?

There were a million characters around the Jac then — not the least of which were the members of my West Indian band. They called themselves the Royal Caribbean Steel Band. They didn't have any Royal charter, but that was the billing they insisted on, and that was the billing they always got at the Jac.

Put Everett, Otto, Bones and Slim together and you had enough sexual power to drive a jumbo jet from here to hell and back. They were the terror of the ladies of the Western World — especially the ladies who came from the Scandinavian part of the Western World.

A lot of *au pair* girls spent their nights at the Jac. Most of them were from Denmark, Sweden and Norway — incredibly beautiful girls with long strong legs and sun kissed skin. They all spoke very good English and came from first-rate homes in their own countries. They all found Everett, Otto, Bones and Slim devastatingly sexy, and it was not unknown for one of them to enjoy all four of the boys — one at a time.

The boys were so black, and the Jac basement dance floor so dark, that you couldn't see them until they smiled. You could only tell they were there when they flashed their big brilliant white teeth.

Every week I got letters from Lawyers in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. They all carried the same request. Could I put them in touch with Everett, Otto, Bones and Slim?

There must be dozens of coffee-coloured descendants of the Royal Caribbean Steel Band walking the streets of Oslo and Stockholm at this very moment, wondering if they will ever see their wandering black daddy.

Everett, Otto, Bones and Slim were good boys, but were unpredictable in many ways. I had to keep a tight rein on them.

Every night I went to the Jac to make sure they had turned up for the evening engagement.

One night I bowled into the Jac and yelled to the staff, 'The boys here okay?'

'No, Allan, they're not here okay,' said one of my girls.

I groaned. 'What is it this time? Girl trouble again?' They were always in trouble with girls in trouble, those boys. Their very names were vaudeville. Believe me, they were quite an act.

'No. They've gone.'

'Gone?'

'Gone for good. For ever, I suppose,' she said, prodding the bacon sizzling in the giant frying-pan on the stove.

'Gone where?'

'Have a guess.'

'Bloody hell and damnation, this is no time for guessing games. Whaddaya think this is, TV?'

'They've gone to Hamburg.'

She said it as though it would knock me flat. It did.

'Hamburg? Did I hear you right? Hamburg?' She might just as well have said the moon.

'That's it. Hamburg. Gone. Will not be back.'

Dear God. I sat down on one of the benches, pushing an old down-at-the-heel bum out of the way. Hamburg. What the hell could four West Indians called Otto, Bones, Slim and Everett be doing in Hamburg? Like whales in the Sahara.

If I had but known it as I sat down, groaning and pushing the old bum out of the way, history was being written in rather a grubby hand. As it turned out, those four West Indians were responsible for the Beatles and me going to Hamburg. They were the catalysts for one of the most amazing chapters in the development of the Beatles as a group.

I made some enquiries among the friends of the steel band. Unknown to me — stealthily, in fact, and with a great deal of deception in my opinion — a man involved in the night life of Hamburg had listened to my boys' playing and lured them away.

A steel band was a rarity at that time. Rare in England, and downright amazing in a place like Hamburg, Germany. As this interloper from Hamburg listened in the cellar of the Jac, the Deutschmark signs must have lit up in his eyes. They were a

great sound, and they would look spectacular against the Aryan blondness of Hamburg.

He talked business with my boys. They listened good. They liked what they heard. This guy talked big money. I paid them only a few quid for playing in the Jac. (But they also picked up dole money at the social welfare centre, so they weren't doing too bad, thank you. Better than cutting sugar cane back in the Caribbean, anyway.) This guy's offer made their big brown eyes pop out. They would be rich, he promised. They would have girls. Big blonde German girls, plump and ripe. The brown eyes popped even more. They had already worked their way through Scandinavian women. Now they could make territorial claims on West Germany. Yes, sir, they would go.

They went, taking their forty-gallon sawn-off steel drums with them.

I was very sad. Not only because I was left without my main attraction in the dance cellar, but also because I loved them as people, as friends. They were colourful, happy and lovable.

Now that the steel band was gone, the Beatles could have more work. I asked them to play in the Jac Cellar whenever they could.

In their childish, guileless way, Otto, Bones, Slim and Everett began to write me letters from Hamburg. Anyone else might have been ashamed to get in touch with me under the circumstances. But not these boys. That's the way they were. They saw something nice and they went for it. That was life, man. For living. No hard feelings. The sun is always shining in your heart, man. They were lovely.

Hamburg, they wrote, was a gas, a ball, a fun town with no holds barred. Money flowed in the gutters and, Allan man, it was just the place for a guy like you to make some loot. Perhaps open a club? Bring some groups? Come on over, Allan. Have a look around.

Bring some groups? Liverpool groups in Hamburg? Ridiculous. But it was worth a looksee. The West Indian boys said they had plenty of contacts among the club owners. They would help. But — Hamburg. That was quite a thought.

It so happened that a group of not-so-tired Liverpool businessmen had got together and chartered a plane to go to Amsterdam for a couple of days. I got myself a ticket on that

plane, and one for Lord Woodbine too. I took him along for laughs and company. Woody was good company, always full of fun. Life was one long joke for him. Still is. He never changes. I intended to have a night out in Amsterdam and then get the train on to Hamburg, take in the scene there, look up the West Indian boys, see what was in it. Hamburg, here I come.

I got the idea of raising some money and taking the Beatles over with me as well. They wanted to have a look at another country. They'd never been anywhere at that time. They were green in many ways.

By this time my club in Seel Street — the Blue Angel, which was to become a Mecca for many groups in the years to come — was doing well. So was the Jac. But I never had much ready money. I am simply not good with money. I can make it. Hanging on to it is my problem.

I went to my bank and asked them for a loan — a couple of hundred quid. The bank manager, a small bald guy looking a bit like a very old Peter Lorre, asked me what I wanted it for.

'I want to go to Hamburg on a business investigation.'

'What sort of business, Allan?'

'I want to take a musical group called the Beatles to find work.'

'The Beatles? That's people?'

'Yeah. It's a group. Very good they are too. They're gonna be big.'

He looked at me as though I didn't have all my marbles.

'Never heard of them,' he said smugly, pressing his fingertips together.

'Well, maybe you haven't, but I see a chance for them over there and a chance for me to make some money.'

British banks aren't like American banks, from what I hear. British banks lend money to those who have. Not to those who haven't. I think this is why so many good guys with great ideas stay on the floor in Britain.

'No, I don't think I can see my way clear to financing a group called the Beatles, Allan. I am sure they're very good and I'm sure you are trying to do the right thing. But money for this kind of venture . . .' He shook his head as though looking at a naughty child.

'Okay, then, thanks anyway. Just thought I'd try.'

I walked out. I wonder how that guy feels now? He turned down the chance to finance the Beatles. Just think of the days when half the money men of London City would beat a path to the Beatles' door chanting 'Take me, take me'.

I talked to a few of my business pals. The story was always the same. They were all making a lotta dough. But they were spending it too. The Beatles' first trip to Hamburg was postponed.

I did the next best thing. I got a few of the groups I was managing together in the cellar of the Jac, set up a tape recorder and said 'There you are, boys. Play your numbers and I'll take this tape over to Hamburg.'

George said, 'What's on in Hamburg, Allan? That's what I can't understand. Why are you so dead keen on going to Hamburg?'

'Just another shot in the dark,' I said. 'The West Indian boys tell me it's a good scene.'

John: 'Do you think our German friends would take kindly to the Beatles? We've got no sabre scars, our kid.' Trust John to put a bit of the acid in.

'You wanna forget about the war, John,' I said. John had this love-hate thing for the Krauts. It was to manifest itself more and more during the Beatles' subsequent visits to Hamburg. Got him in trouble too, besides providing a few laughs.

Paul chipped in: 'What sort of stuff do you think we ought to do on the tape, Allan?'

We stood there thinking out loud.

'Do anything you have a mind to. Do what you do best.'

Stuart: 'Let's just bash on and get the stuff on the tape — eh, Allan?'

'That's right, boys, get it all down there. Could make a fortune for us all.'

I had got Cass and the Casanovas and a trad jazz band group, Noel Walker and the Stompers, to come over and put their sound on the tape as well. I thought I would take over a good cross-section of the Liverpool music. Cass and his group and the trad jazz outfit didn't go into the venture with any great enthusiasm but they agreed to cut the tapes.

'Now listen,' I said to John Lennon, 'you know how to work

this thing?' I indicated the tape machine. I went through the operation to show them all how it worked. I had an appointment with my accountant. Otherwise I would have stayed to see everything went okay.

'Now,' I said to the Beatles, who seemed to have more of a clue about it than the others, 'd'you think you can manage it?'

The Beatles said not to worry. Everything would come out right. They'd attend to things.

'Make it good, boys,' I said, preparing to leave the cellar. 'This could be the dawn of a new era.' We were always kidding each other about the great golden future.

'Leave it to us, Al. There's nothing to worry about,' said the Beatles.

Leave it to us, they said. Don't worry about a thing, Al, they said. So I went off to my appointment. I left them to it. I should have stuck around.

I packed the tapes the boys made into my bag, along with a change of underwear and a couple of shirts and shaving gear. Then Woody and I were off.

We all hit the cheap champagne on the plane and by the time we touched down at Amsterdam those businessmen were ready to take the city apart. Woody and I parted company with them in the centre of the town. Last seen, one of their party was climbing a lamp standard and bombarding some people in a pavement café with empty bottles. As the police moved in, Woody and I moved out.

We fetched up outside a swanky-looking nightclub. None of your Beat cellar stuff, this. On the door was a commissionaire with a frozen face and white gloves.

Lord Woodbine and I were both wearing top hats, and I had a black thick bushy beard at the time. Woody is black as the ace of spades and even he would not claim his black is beautiful. Interesting, maybe. But beautiful? Not nohow.

We went to walk in past this commissionaire, bold as brass.

'Just a minute, gentlemen.' He spoke perfect English and made the word 'gentlemen' sound like some sort of disease.

It strikes me now that we must have been an odd-looking pair even for the swinging city of Amsterdam. Why the top hats I'll never know. They just seemed like a good idea at the time. I

suppose we were all a bit mad on the burgeoning Beat scene in Liverpool. You had to be to get by.

This man, symbol of authority and uptightness, continued to look down his stolid Dutch nose at us.

'What's up?' said I, trying to walk as tall as a guy of my size can walk.

He said something about the joint being a members-only club. I knew this was a load of malarkey, and anyway he was trying it on the wrong couple of guys.

'But listen,' I said, 'this is Lord Woodbine. The only black lord on Merseyside.' Which was very true.

He immediately changed his tune from arrogance to grovelling.

'Lord Woodbine?'

'Lord Woodbine,' I said, giving Woody a dig in the ribs.

'A real live lord from Liverpool, England.'

Suddenly the whole place opened up its arms. The flunkey ushered us in, announcing loudly to anyone he met, 'This is Lord Woodbine from Liverpool, England.'

They put us at a ringside table and Woody did his bit, putting on the style, calling for champagne in a cross between his normal jovial West Indian plum-in-mouth accent and what he thought might be high-class English. There was no stopping us. We were class.

One of the compères announced us from the stage as 'Lord Woodbine from Liverpool, England, and friend.'

Second billing to Lord Woodbine. What a comedown.

The waiters produced a nice clean fresh menu and asked Woody to sign it. 'If you please, your lordship.'

'Dat's all right, my good man,' said Woody, scrawling his name right across the *á la carte*. 'Woodbine of Liverpool', he wrote.

They were eating out of our hands. We knocked back a couple of bottles of champagne, one of them on the house, and then settled back to enjoy the cabaret.

This was some sort of a Spanish flamenco group. One of the leading dancers had heard us being announced and wanted to enjoy a little sport. He made a couple of weak cracks about the Lord from Liverpool between dances and references to my beard. So when this guy was right at the climax of his act, going

through the motions of playing a bull, I leapt onstage shouting 'Ha — toro — toro', like the real bullfighters do.

I stood there waving my jacket at him as though it was a bullfighter's cape. I shaped up to this guy, who froze on the spot.

The customers loved it. They shouted and screamed encouragement at me and kept it up till this flamenco dancer ran offstage almost in tears. I took a bow and jumped off the stage and back to my seat with Lord Woodbine.

A couple of minutes later, lord or no lord, we were politely but firmly asked to leave when I started drinking champagne from a hostess's slipper. Drinking champagne out of a beautiful girl's slipper was all right. What they didn't like was the bit where I threw the slipper over my shoulder afterwards. It landed, I understand, in someone's supper and nearly gave the poor diner a case of severe shock.

We staggered out into the Amsterdam night and linked up with the Liverpool businessmen. By that time they were pissed out of their minds. They were so drunk they didn't know the 'girls' they had picked up were transvestites. No doubt they would find out some time later when it was almost too late to say 'Sorry, no thanks'. As they say, a standing prick knows no conscience. A lot of guys find out about themselves that way. But that's another scene and another story.

One of the businessmen did a soft-shoe shuffle on a bar top and then plunged headlong into a crowd of boozers. I shouted to Woody, 'By Christ, he's broken his neck'. I had seen the way he fell. It seemed to me he had landed on the top of his head.

I examined the bloke as he lay there. Blood was oozing out of a huge gash in his scalp. I tried to get his friends interested in his injury, but they were all too far gone and fascinated by their 'girl friends'. An ambulance arrived and the bloke was driven off. We never did hear what happened to him. Perhaps he's still over there, a naturalised Dutchman.

What a night.

Next day Lord Woodbine and I, feeling awfully hung over and bleary-eyed, took the train for Hamburg. We checked into a sleazy hotel and headed for the dockside pub where the steel band was supposed to be playing.

They weren't there. But the boss knew about them. After I

had proved I was a friend of theirs and not someone trying to collect a bad debt, he gave us another address in the notorious Reeperbahn red-light area where anything goes — and often does.

The place we were directed to featured a non-stop strip show. There wasn't enough light in there to illuminate a small wardrobe. The idea was for the girls to do their act and then to sit with the customers. As is normal in these places, the aim of the game was to part the mug from his money. To bring this about, the girls resorted to all manner of sexual ploys, including doing it right there at the table.

Walking about in the gloom you had to be very, very careful not to get involved in some very interesting situations. And I don't mean treading on people's toes.

No one there had heard of Otto, Slim, Bones and Everett. Lord Woodbine, groping his way around in the gloom, bumped into a stripper who was between acts. This left me on my own to explore this place called Hamburg.

Someone told me about another club called the Kaiserkeller. I took a cab there and found it to be housed in a basement capable of catering to a thousand people at a time. It was an enormous place, compared with the tiny night spots in Liverpool. The decor was kind of nautical. There were glass floats on the walls and lots of fishing nets. The bar was built in the shape of a ship and there were brass portholes studded round the place. Very effective.

They were doing big business. There wasn't a vacant table. Still, I detected a glum atmosphere, as though people were waiting for something to happen, for someone to arrive. Weird. I couldn't figure it out.

The music was being provided by a stodgy, uninspired, perfectly hideous German group trying to play rock'n'roll. They were attempting to do the 'Tooty-Frooty' number, but they were playing it in strict military style, like a regimental band on a night out. It sounded like the Death March.

The group had no natural rhythm. It was excruciating to listen to them after the wild, stimulating sounds of Liverpool that I had become used to. A German oompah stick-it-up-your-jumper band trying to be with it. *Ja* — so zis was rock'n'roll Hamburg style? There was room for my boys all right.

Liverpool seemed a million miles away then. I stood at the bar with a drink, thinking of the Beatles. They would send these Germans crazy. I felt a tremendous excitement building up in me. I had come all this way on a tip from my West Indian friends, and all the while I had been dreading it would be a complete waste of time and money. Now I felt I was not on a wild goose chase.

The customers were taking no notice of the German band's hideous efforts. They were drinking, talking, shouting. One or two couples were doing a listless kind of dance. Suddenly the band stopped and an MC announced that there would be music from the juke. You could feel a surge of anticipation in the crowd. This indeed was what they had been waiting for. The jukebox began to blast out Elvis Presley and Tommy Steele records. The crowd went mad. In an instant the floor was a welter of bodies. The place was electrified as though someone had plugged in a giant pipeline of adrenalin.

Boy oh boy, I thought, if they respond like this to a fucking jukebox, just think what my live Liverpool groups would do. I knew that this was it. I had travelled to find some sort of a new home for my boys. Why? I just felt that the Liverpool boys needed a little force feeding, a new experience, a mental and artistic fattening up, if you like. A catalyst to push their music into greatness. Why Hamburg? I don't know. It was simply that it happened that way. That most unlikely of places — or was it? It was a great rollicking port, rumbustious as Liverpool. Big-hearted, lusty, with wide-open arms. So was it so odd that it was to happen there?

But hold . . . I am rambling on ahead.

I stood there a while thinking over my next move. I knew no one in the town. I couldn't find Otto, Bones, Slim and Everett. To whom could I turn? Why not start right here in the Kaiser-keller?

I tapped one of the burly waiters as he was skating past with an empty tray. He spoke good English.

'Listen,' I said, 'how do I get to meet your boss?'

He looked at me suspiciously as if to say: Who are you? The law? A debt collector? Everyone acts like that in club land, all over the world. It's a natural, suspicious reaction in a naturally suspicious, rocky business.

I said, 'I'm in the club business myself back in Liverpool, England. It's okay. I'm one of you really.'

'I'll see,' he said, hurrying on over to the bar for refills of his empty glasses.

I stood there and waited, hoping. Then I saw this great beefy bouncer eyeing me up and down and thought that maybe I'd stepped out of line asking for the boss without preliminary negotiations. Then this bouncer swaggered over to me. My stomach muscles knotted. I frighten easy. But I don't flee.

'You asking for the boss? What you want?'

'I'd like to talk business with him.' No point in trying to sell the Beatles to this torpedo.

'What sort of business?'

This was getting us nowhere. 'I've got a proposition for him. About music. You know — tooty-frooty-all-rooty.'

'Tooty-frooty-all-rooty?' he queried. We sounded like a double act.

'Yeah. I manage groups of musicians in England.'

'Ah — *ja*.' His fat face lost some of its suspicion. 'Music. Goot.'

We both smiled together, chummy at last.

I had the tapes with me that the boys had recorded back in the Jac. If I could play them to the club boss, he would get a pretty good idea of what they could do for this joint. They sure as hell would do business more good than the oompah-oompah band.

I went through my 'take me to your leader' routine again. This time the bouncer said something to a guy in a white jacket. A minute later the white jacket came back and motioned me to follow him. We wended our way through the massed bodies still gyrating to Elvis and Tommy and came to the door of what I took to be the owner's office. Sure enough, I had got through at last to Mister Big.

White jacket knocked on the door and I heard someone bawl out '*Ja*'. White jacket opened the door and said something in German to a bloke sitting behind a desk. This was the owner, Bruno Koschmider. He was a little crippled guy who had at one time been a circus clown. For a clown, he didn't have much of a sense of humour, it turned out. But he seemed pleasant enough right then.

He spoke no English and the only German I knew was culled

from the movies — stuff like *'Jawohl, mein Herr'* and *'Heil Hitler'*. Not much help in trying to explain about the Beatles and the other groups.

I tried to explain to Bruno what my mission was all about. We made no progress until he called in one of his staff who could speak perfect English. We were getting along fine chatting about the great Beatles when another waiter dashed in and gabbled a long string of German in a very excited voice. I thought maybe the place was being raided by the cops, always an occupational hazard and uppermost in a club owner's mind at all times. I had put the Beatles' tape on the desk. At the interruption from the waiter, I picked it up and slipped it back into my briefcase. If the cops were around, I had better be prepared for a quick exit.

But I needn't have worried. It wasn't the cops. Just a little trouble with one of the customers. A little trouble?

The waiter who had barged into the boss's office had left the door wide open. I could see out into the club area. There was a guy on the floor and he was having a pretty rough time of it. He was surrounded by a gang of waiters and bouncers who were busy putting the boot in. They were quite dispassionate about it, going about the work with typical German thoroughness. The guy on the floor was offering no resistance.

Liverpool had hardened me but I was still sickened by this wanton violence. Whatever the guy had done he was now in no way to answer back or make further trouble.

Bruno Koschmider had different ideas. His eyes lit up with the excitement of battle. He yanked open a drawer in his desk and pulled out a thick ebony truncheon. The sort of thing you can use as a ruler for drawing straight lines. It can also double as a wicked instrument of attack and defence.

For a cripple, Bruno moved fast on his feet. Perhaps it was a leftover from his circus days when he had to dodge all those buckets of fake paint clowns are always lobbing over each other. Out of the office door he hopped, waving his ebony cosh. He wasn't going to use it for ruling any lines, that was certain.

He screamed at the rest of the guys to get out of the way. They fell back like well-drilled troops leaving Bruno to take centre stage.

Bruno waded into the poor heap on the floor and worked him

over. He was a mean guy to tangle with. I learned that early in the game.

When the ex-clown finished his handiwork he signalled for his men to remove what was left.

This was a mean town if you didn't watch your step. It made Garston Baths look like a garden of rest.

Koschmider came back into the office. I took the tapes out of my briefcase again.

'I am sorry about that,' he said through the interpreter. 'You understand — being in the club business. There are some evil people about.'

Yeah, he could say that again.

Bruno sat down and wiped the blood off the truncheon. He carefully placed it back in the desk drawer and sat down in his chair. The only indication of his recent valiant efforts was a small bead of sweat glinting on his upper lip.

I went into explaining about the Liverpool scene, about the groups, the clubs and my part in it.

'I am the manager of the best Beat groups in the world,' I told him modestly. If you have something to sell, sell it, say I. Sell it big.

Bruno said, 'Are they as good as Tommy Steele?' Poor old Tommy. I did him anything but proud that day. 'Tommy fucking Steele?' I said in disgust. 'Come off it. They'd beat the pants off that feller. Tommy fucking Steele?'

I tried to make Tommy, by comparison, sound like a bum from way back. I told Tommy about this in later years and we both had a good laugh.

'Elvis Presley?' queried Bruno.

'Elvis fucking Presley?' I sneered, bracketing him with good old Tommy. 'Jeeezus H. Christ, you just have to hear these guys — especially the Beatles. They're going to be the biggest thing since the zip fastener.'

What was this zip fastener? asked Bruno through his mouthpiece. Another group?

I skirted around that tank trap. No, just a figure of speech, Bruno old pal.

Bruno got very enthusiastic. No doubt he reasoned if the boys I had were better than Elvis Presley and Tommy Steele he was on to something big.

Just to keep Bruno's temperature up I told the mouthpiece to indicate that the tooty-frooty group wouldn't last two minutes in Liverpool. They were a disaster. A charade. A fraud. A blot on the good name of popular music. If Bruno employed my boys, his place would jump all the time and not only when the jukebox came on and the alleged band took a rest.

'It'll make you a fucking fortune,' I said. 'You'll see. A fucking fortune.'

'*Ja?*'

'*Ja, ja,*' I answered.

Without listening to my tapes he asked what sort of payment I had in mind for these amazing groups. I said I figured on a hundred pounds a week and assistance in transport costs from Liverpool. He didn't make any objection about the financial side, but he was very eager to know when he could hear the groups, especially the Beatles I kept raving about.

'This is the music?' he asked, tapping the tapes lying on the desk.

'Sure is,' I said. 'You got a tape recorder?'

Yes, sir, he had a tape recorder, a beautiful Grundig which he produced from behind his desk. So. He could hear the fabulous Merseyside sound right away.

You remember, dear reader, how I left the Beatles and the rest of the boys in the cellar of the Jac to record their stuff. Remember how I said I should have stuck around to see that everything went okay? But I had a date with my accountant, so I went off and left the Beatles and the two other groups to do it themselves. Stupid I was. Yes, you're way ahead of me.

'Just get an earful of this,' I said, as he threaded the tape on his machine. 'This'll knock you for six. You'll never be the same again, Bruno old buddy.'

The mouthpiece was translating this all faithfully, I hoped. At least Bruno was getting the drift. I watched him finally get the tape all lined up. Then he switched on and I waited for the Beatles' sound to come blasting out. Waited for Bruno's face to wreathe in smiles and for him to sign on the dotted line. Oh brother, this was it. We were on our way.

'They'll have Hamburg on its ear . . .' my gloating voice trailed away. What came out of the recorder was not music. It was an absolute cacophony. A sound track for a very poor

horror movie. Bruno pulled a face. I couldn't believe my ears.

'Hey, look here — you got that thing playing the right way? You put it on backwards or something? Is it working okay?'

Ja. It was a perfectly good machine, said Bruno. It always had been up to now. Nothing wrong with it.

We tried it every way and the sound came out just the same. A bloody awful racket. Nothing like any music I'd ever heard.

Bruno gave me a look as if to say, 'Are you pulling my leg?' I assured him I was not.

After we had tussled with the tape recorder for half an hour it became obvious that the Beatles and the rest of the boys had ruined the recording session. I should have stayed behind in the cellar of the Jac to supervise. I must have been mad to go off to see my accountant on that afternoon. I can't even remember what my appointment was about. Some fiddling, trivial matter, no doubt.

'I'm sorry about this, Herr Koschmider,' I said. He could see I was genuinely upset. I had trekked from Liverpool to Hamburg, heart full of hope and enthusiasm and a briefcase full of junk. I could have murdered John, George, Paul and Stuart at that moment. I was shattered. But Bruno didn't let the horribly screeching tapes put him off. He was still interested in the Liverpool sound.

'You get another recording done and send it to me,' he said. 'You can do that?'

'Sure I can.' I told him that the best group at that time was the Beatles and he should hear them for himself. A tape was only second-hand experience.

I cursed whatever ham-fisted bastard had ruined the tape and took my leave of Bruno, trying to cover my chagrin. What rotten bloody luck. Liverpool to Hamburg with a bagful of crap.

'You must send me some more tapes,' said Bruno, shaking my hand.

I journeyed back to Liverpool very downcast. It was a lonely trek as well. Lord Woodbine stayed behind in Hamburg, where he found the scene very much to his liking. That guy could be buried on a dung heap and come up smelling of roses, as my old army chum used to say. Good old Woody. A real survivor.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

You little bugger . . . make it good

Back in Liverpool, Hamburg receded from my mind. I tore a strip off the Beatles about the tapes fiasco.

'Jesus Christ, we weren't the only ones handling the machine that day.'

'Come off it, Al. How do you know we fucked it up?'

'Let's make another one, Al. You can go over again.'

'Yeah, how about it, Al? We'll all club up and pay your fare.'

'Club up?' I exploded. 'What are you lot going to club up with? Fucking washers? You haven't got a bean between you. Club up,' I snorted. They fell silent.

But I couldn't be too hard on them. There was no proof that they were responsible for ruining the tapes. But I had more or less left them, as being the intelligent ones, in charge in the Jac cellar on that occasion Ah, well.

Larry Parnes wrote me a letter offering summer work for the Beatles and my other groups in Blackpool and Yarmouth. He wanted them for backing his stable of stars. The money looked as though it might be good.

All the lads were enthusiastic. Spring was coming. The sap was rising. New life was being regenerated. All that crap.

I wrote off Hamburg as experience. In that period (1960), the money was rolling in quite well from the Blue Angel. It was becoming the number one night spot for the younger swingers in the area. There were also a few senior citizens grooving away quietly there.

Lots and lots of show-business people made a point of signing my wall at the Blue. They had heard about the scene going there, and whenever they were appearing locally in Manchester or Liverpool, they called in for drinks and a chat: such people as the late Judy Garland; Rex Harrison and his then wife Rachel Roberts; the playwright Alun Owen, who was to write a

lot of the Beatles' film, *A Hard Day's Night*; Jonathan Routh, the TV star Lionel Bart, the song-writer; Tommy Steele, of course; Antonio, the Spanish dancer; Arthur Fiedler, boss of the Boston Pops Orchestra; the Rolling Stones; the Dave Clark Five; Billy J. Kramer; Gerry Marsden and the Pacemakers; Anna Neagle — the list is endless.

Anyway . . . back to the Beatles.

Parnes wanted my groups to back his boys Georgie Fame, Joe Brown, Tommy Bruce and Peter Wynne. This was big news for my boys and they were cockahoop. Things had been a bit slack and many of them had had to go back to their old jobs, labouring or making a couple of bob where they could. Not the Beatles, though. They had stuck it out — and together.

But Derry Wilkie and the Seniors, for example, had more or less split up. Howie Casey, their manager, had gone back to his 'civilian' job because he had mouths to feed. Now, with the promise of stage work, they packed in their ordinary jobs and set about buying new stage outfits, borrowing money where they could, begging it, making it. Then came the bombshell from Parnes.

Derry Wilkie got a letter from Parnes cancelling the Seniors' engagement in Blackpool. Derry and Howie, who is a very big guy indeed, came storming round to see me at the Blue Angel. Howie was determined to rough me up. Derry, not being much of a fighting man, was going to watch. Howie was a real hard knock. One blow from his fist and it would have been bye-bye Williams.

When they got through the door of the Blue, Howie grabbed me by my lapels and said, 'Now listen here, you little bastard — you know I've given up my fucking job for the Parnes gigs and now they're cancelled? I've got fucking mouths to fill. What about it, Williams?'

He waved a fist as big as a York ham under my tiny nose. My feet struggled to stay on the plush carpet of the Blue. One of my bouncers, seeing the boss was in trouble, started to move in. I signalled him back. It wasn't wise to antagonise Howie. He would have eaten us both for breakfast.

'Listen, Al, it don't seem right,' said Derry. He's a good-looking West Indian boy, that Derry, and he often gives the impression of being queer although he is very much the

George, John and Pete Best backing American singer-comedian Davey Jones at New Brighton Tower, 1961 (Photo: Richard Matthews)

George, Rory Storm and Ringo, back-stage with fans (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Above: The Aldershot gig left something to be desired: only eighteen people showed up (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Left: George and John dance a slow foxtrot (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Above: George, John, Paul and Pete gallantly playing on (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Left: Paul feigns a deathbed scene, while George, John and Pete collect for a wreath (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Above and left: John doing his well-known hunchback act, 1963 (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Below left: George in the Cavern late 1962 (Photo: Pat Dawson)

Below: Paul singing solo at New Brighton Tower (Photo: Richard Matthews)

George, Pete, John and Paul happy on stage at the Cavern (Photo: Richard Matthews)

Taking a breath, with Paul looking worse for the wear (Photo: Richard Matthews)

(Photo: Barry Chang)

uart with Astrid
hoto: Richard
atthews,

George, Pete Best, John and Paul outside the Cavern 1961 (Photo: Yvonne Maher)

George, Stuart and John pose at a visiting fair in Hamburg, 1961 (Photo: Astrid)

Three of the Rolling Stones sign the wall at the Blue Angel. *l to r*, the late Brian Jones, Mick Jagger, Bill Wyman and Angel's manager Dave Beattie (Photo: Barry Farrell)

Ringo Starr playing with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes at a local church hall in 1961 (Photo: Richard Matthews)

other way. He sniggered at me, hanging there from Howie's fist.

'Listen, Howie, if you put me down I'll tell you . . .'

Howie dropped me. 'Make it good, you little bugger. Make it real good.'

'I can't make it anything. This is the first I've heard of any cancellations. Honest to Christ . . .'

And it was true. I never did figure out why the bookings were cancelled. Now it doesn't matter. What does matter is that incident led to the birth of the Hamburg scene. And through the birth of the Hamburg scene, the birth of the fabulous Beatles.

Howie ranted and raved while Derry pranced about lisping encouragement.

'We're gonna burst' (severely damage) 'this guy Parnes,' yelled Howie.

If Parnes, sitting in his London office at that time, could have seen the mayhem in Howie's eyes, he would have got out of town real fast.

Howie went on: 'We've bought new fucking gear and everything. Now here we are with no fucking jobs. You gotta do something.'

I was genuinely shocked at the new development. My boys were used to living close to the poverty line, but this was pushing them over it.

'Parnes,' said Howie, 'we'll have the cunt. We'll do the bastard.'

Derry whirled about the Blue, flashing his honey-gold skin, emphasising the words 'a real cunt, man, a real cunt'.

My mind was working quickly. I had to do something to help these boys — and fast. But what? I had an idea. The Two I's Coffee Bar in London's Soho was at that time an auditioning place for groups trying to make the big time. Tommy Littlewood, the owner, was a good friend of mine. He had given Tommy Steele his first break. Tommy was discovered at the café and went on to international fame. Hollywood and all that.

Talent scouts made a habit of calling in at the Two I's to chat up Tommy Littlewood and ask him what groups were new, how good they were. They used Tommy as a sounding board. If Tommy said a group or a singer was good, they pricked up their ears and asked him to lay on an audition. Tommy was also a

very generous guy and he often gave a handout to anyone who spun him a genuine hard-luck yarn.

'Look here, lads, I tell you what we'll do. We'll bash off straightaway down to London and see if we can get you on at the Two I's. Tommy Littlewood is a friend of mine and perhaps he'll come up with something. You never know what's moving in the big city. There's fuck all for you here now.'

It was a slender chance and the boys knew it But they were desperate. They were down to cadging ciggies from their friends. At least by taking them to Tommy's place I might keep their minds off their plan to go and cripple Larry Parnes. If they did that, they would get nowhere in show business at all, at all.

'It's better than sitting here on our arses, I suppose,' said Derry. 'I think we ought to give it a try.'

We both looked at big Howie. He was simmering down now.

'I'll speak to the others,' he said and went out to put the proposition to the rest of the lads who made up the fabulous sound of Derry Wilkie and the Seniors. A first-class group. It was a sin and a shame to see them out of work and getting fucked about that way.

At the back of my mind I had the idea that once Tommy Littlewood heard Derry and the Seniors, he would think so highly of them that he would suggest making them a permanent feature at his place. I had faith in miracles in those days. I had hope and plenty to spare. It gets less as the years go by. Inevitable, I suppose, with someone who has lived on hope and nothing else for too long. Before a man can be whole, he needs some success. Even just a little bit. Without it, a man is a slave to bitterness, narrow-mindedness and despair. Here endeth the lesson.

We drove down to London in a van. On the way we shouted defiance at the world and London in particular. The big city didn't frighten us, no sir.

Of course, it really did. But no sir, we shouted at the English countryside as it rolled by. We're gonna take that city by its ears and shake the gold right out of its pockets.

'We won't come back till we make it there,' said Derry, flicking his cigarette butt out the window.

'Say, man,' said one of the group, watching the butt arc on to the grass verge, 'that was a hell of a big dog-end to throw away.

I could have had a drag out of that. I ain't even got a dog-end.'

'Ah shit, man,' said Derry, 'we'll all be rich one day.'

'Yeah, rich as creosote,' said I, sitting at the wheel.

We laughed and talked about the numbers the boys played the best. The ones they could play for Tommy and whatever other big wheels happened to be in the Two I's. Suddenly we all had this optimistic feeling. Big times were gonna roll. We pulled up at a roadside pub and piled in.

The treat was on me. The boys didn't have a tosser between them. I dug into my pocket and came up with a crumpled fiver. I bought four packs of ciggies and passed them round. Then I told the barman to put up a dozen pints of black and tan — Guinness and bitter beer or mild mixed. A lovely drink. Guaranteed to get you pissed in no time at all.

After the fiver had gone, we trooped outside and tore down the highway towards London and the Two I's.

When we pulled up outside Tommy's place he gave us a big welcome.

'Hi, Allan, hi, boys.'

'Listen, Tommy,' I said, 'this is Derry Wilkie and the Seniors. They're good boys and make a nice sound. Can I put them on? They're looking for work. They really need the break.'

'Sure, sure, Allan. Put 'em on tonight. Put 'em on now. Any time you like. Just get right up there on the stand and blast away. Any friend of yours is a friend of mine, to coin a phrase.'

The boys couldn't believe their ears. Going on at the famous Two I's. Perhaps the good times really were gonna roll. Perhaps it hadn't all been bluster to keep their spirits up.

The boys carried their gear in and started up. Derry was in fine form and the place began to jump. He is a spectacular performer, Derry, getting up to all sorts of gyrations. He brings a real jungle wildness into the Mersey Beat. I defy anyone to keep still when Derry is doing a number. It's a physical impossiblity.

Now he and the Seniors were slaughtering the Two I's. The place had never heard anything their equal. The boys were great — raw, authoritative, compelling, earthy, elemental. You could feel the electric charge blasting through the minds and bodies of the audience. The Big Beat plus the jungle, straight out of the old big muddy Mersey. That these boys should be

grubbing about saving their dog-ends was a bloody crying shame.

I was standing there with Tommy, feeling proud, when a guy came up to me and tapped me on the arm. He was a queer-looking cove. He wore glasses and had an eye patch.

'Say,' he said, 'd'you know this group?'

'Sure. They're my group. I'm their manager. Why, friend?' I was hoping this was an agent coming at me with a big fat offer.

'They're bloody marvellous,' said Patch Eye.

'You an agent?' I asked.

'Nah, just another customer. But I know a great group when I hear one, that's for sure. And these people aren't just great. They're fucking stars.'

'That's right.'

So this guy only wanted to be friendly. Well, one couldn't have too many friends in the big city. But he carried on gabbing.

'See that guy over there?' He pointed to a corner in the dark.

'Nah — I can't see a thing.'

'Well, there's a guy over there and he's been talking to me in German. I know a bit of German. He can't speak any English really. Just bits. He said he's a booker from Germany, or an owner or something. He sent me over to ask if he could talk about this group here, Derry and the boys, or whatever they're called.'

Ah, ah. Bingo. We had a bite. The magic of the Two I's was shining through and on to us. Glory, glory.

'You don't know who he is? German, you say?' My mind went back to my abortive Hamburg trip. Germany had had bad vibes for me after that. (Not Germany's fault, mind you.) I looked over in the corner. I still couldn't really make out a figure, just a blob moving about, drinking coffee, I supposed.

I ambled over and said, 'Hey, mister, you wanted to talk to me about this group?'

This bloke looked up and stone the crows if it wasn't Bruno Koschmider, the ex-circus clown from Hamburg, the owner, no less, of the Kaiserkeller. Full circle. Destiny. How could I doubt the stars and fate after this? One would think that we all ran on railway lines, on a permanent collision course, in and out

of each other's tracks. Come to think of it, maybe that's the way it always has been. The world, as the man said, is a small place. If you keep moving.

'Why, Bruno,' I shouted, grabbing him round his skinny shoulders. 'Bruno — it can't be you.' We were like long-lost brothers. Here he was in the Two I's, all the way from Hamburg. I couldn't believe it.

Bruno gabbled away in German and a bit of gobbledegook English which must have been the result of coaching by his bilingual waiter, the one who had done the interpreting back in Hamburg. Neither of us could get very far. He made it very plain that he was tremendously excited about Derry and the boys. And the Beatles. He still remembered how I'd raved about the Beatles.

Bruno was a man of resources. He had friends in Soho. He sent a messenger out to a nearby café called the Heaven and Hell. Back came the messenger with a contact of his called Steiner, who worked at the H. and H. Steiner could speak perfect English. Communications were established.

'These are like the Beatles?' he said, indicating Derry and the Seniors.

'Nah. They're completely different. But they are both great groups.' Bruno had the name of the Beatles firmly embedded in his mind. I must have done a great sales job when I was in Hamburg.

'I waited and waited for you to send me some more tapes,' said Bruno, through Steiner. 'But they didn't come and I thought you had forgotten me.'

'Nah — you know how it is in the club game. You get bogged down by other things.'

Ja, he said. He understood. But now to business.

'When you didn't contact me again I decided to come over here to England and ask around about you and these Liverpool groups. I thought I would make for London first and see what was going on in the music scene. Everyone said to go to the Two I's, and here I am. And here are you. It is unbelievable, is it not? This great coincidence? Perhaps it is an omen.'

'Yeah,' I said, 'could be. I hope it's a good omen, not a bad one.'

Strangely fateful words, looking back now. It all seems to have been a dream. I can hardly believe it happened. A million-to-one chance.

'I asked around for Allan Williams and the Beatles, thinking you might be known here in London, but no one had heard of you except Tommy Littlewood.'

For some reason Bruno had got Liverpool, London and the Beatles all jumbled together into one big scene in his mind. He didn't seem to understand that there were a couple of hundred miles between the two cities. Ah well, it didn't matter. He was interested in my groups.

It turned out that Bruno had had playing for him Tony Sheridan, a really first-class singer and guitarist who had brought tremendous business to the Kaiserkeller. (Tony was to record with the Beatles at a later date.) Now Tony, like many a superb artist, could be very temperamental. And so could Bruno when he felt like it. Their association had not always been smooth. In the end Tony terminated his contract at the Kaiserkeller and, much to Bruno's consternation, went over to the opposition in Hamburg, the Top Ten Club. And he took his huge following of customers with him.

This put dear old Bruno in trouble. Or lumber, as we say. His star had gone — with a big hunk of his trade. So he had come to London, anxious to find someone who could pull the paying customers back into the Kaiserkeller. So here we were in the Two I's.

Just think of the chain of events. If Larry Parnes hadn't changed his booking plans . . . if Howie and Derry had not threatened to knock Parnes' and my blocks off . . . if I hadn't, in desperation, with my feet suspended inches from the floor of the Blue Angel, thought of the Two I's and Tommy Littlewood . . . But you could go on and on.

Bruno was in trouble. His cash flow was thinning out. He badly needed a transfusion of talent. I had the talent — Derry and the Seniors and the Beatles.

'Let's talk business,' I said. We proceeded.

'I can have Derry and these boys?'

'Sure you can.'

I was glad to get Derry and the Seniors into work and off my back. There wasn't even time to sign contracts. Within three

days the boys were on their way to Hamburg, all done on a handshake. I trusted Bruno and he trusted me.

The boys had no easy trip. They didn't have the essential work permits. They were tossed off the train at the border between Holland and Germany by the border guards and immigration people. There they were, stuck in this crummy railway station with their suitcases and musical gear, hardly any money, travelling only in their stage clothing. They spent a hell of a night shivering on the station benches, cursing Allan Williams and Bruno Koschmider all in the same breath.

The boys had told the officials on the border that they were students going on holiday and taking their instruments with them to provide entertainment for their friends. The officials took one look at Howie and Derry and said the German equivalent of if they were students, the border guards were the Andrews Sisters.

The boys' bones might be whitening on the station benches today for all the guards cared. But Howie made the boys cough up all the dough they had. This wasn't much but it was enough to put a phone call through to me at the Jac.

That phone at the Jac. If I had had a tape recorder tap on it, it could write its own book.

'Hey, man,' Howie's voice came crackling over the line. 'We're in real trouble, Al. Real trouble. You gotta help us.'

'Oh, for Christ's sake, what's the matter now, Howie?'

'We're holed up at the border of Holland and Germany. They've heaved us off the train and we're stuck here, man. Miles from no-fucking-where.'

'Bloody hell, Howie, what can I do here in Liverpool?'

What could I do, I thought frantically, surrounded by the human flotsam of Liverpool and bacon butties in the Jac. I'd have to get Bruno Koschmider into action. I knew he had quite a lot of influence among the police in Hamburg. (And Germany as a whole, I was to discover.)

'Just you sit there tight, Howie. Don't go roaming round the countryside. I'll do something. I'll get on to Bruno right away. He'll help. He's gotta help.'

Was there a hint of despair and panic in my voice? There was.

I rang Bruno in Hamburg. He said don't worry, he'd sort it

all out. He didn't seem one bit bothered by what to me appeared to be a catastrophic development.

Bruno pulled a few strings. All at once the border guards were smiling and friendly. The group was waved into Germany. And success.

Derry Wilkie and the Seniors arrived in Hamburg late at night. Without a wash or a shave, they dived straight onstage. They were ragged, dirty and tired.

Derry picked up the hand mike, the band blasted into their first number. Exhausted, starving, unclean, they took the Kaiserkeller apart. The Liverpool Sound had come to Hamburg, with a coloured boy from the West Indies leading the way.

Hamburg and the customers at the Kaiserkeller had heard and seen nothing like it. Word got around about this new kind of entertainment from Liverpool, England, and the Kaiserkeller's profits showed a sharp upward turn.

Derry Wilkie and the Seniors became celebrities overnight. They were loved, fawned on, cosseted, even worshipped. Girls were on their backs. Derry and the boys held court nightly at the bar of the Kaiserkeller. They never bought a drink. They didn't need to. Every way they turned, there was some cheery German face eager to fill their glasses. They were like a ragged band of pilgrims that had slogged through the desert, over mountains and across deep rivers, to arrive at the promised land.

Sounds corny and show-biz movie, but this is exactly what happened. This is the way Hamburg opened up its big fat boozy arms and its gold-lined heart to the boys from Liverpool.

Ah, they were great days. In everyone's life there is a peak time of nostalgia, a time you can look back on and say, 'These, folks, were the very best days of our very best days.' The pity of it is, though, you never realise it at the time. The good times are always gonna come. But in truth, the good times are always now.

Bruno was beside himself with delight. He had dragged the old customers back, and more besides. Derry and the boys were kings of the Reeperbahn.

Derry did a kind of love-making act with the mike. He whiplashed the electric lead at the audience and worked himself into

a musical and sexual frenzy, taking his audience along with him. He was an exotic-erotic figure — slim, incredibly good-looking, and oozing raw sex. He made Tom Jones look like a sexual cripple.

The Germans still had this tremendous Aryan pride in the blond and the beautiful and the purity of the *Volksblut*. But at the same time, Derry in their midst provided them with a kinky voyeurish pleasure. He coupled the animal vitality of some imagined jungle with the homespun aggressiveness and gutsy appeal of Merseyside. He was a dark sexual demon in their midst. They were hypnotised by Derry and his music. They shivered with vicarious delight, feeling strangely and sinfully stimulated.

Bruno Koschmider knew when he was on to a good thing. He wanted more from where this came from. And the only place it could come from was Liverpool. And the guy who had it was me, Allan Williams.

I got a letter from Bruno, saying he was going to open another club in the same area. Could I send another group as good as Derry Wilkie and the Seniors?

Bruno's new club was the Indra, just a short distance away from the Kaiserkeller. He didn't mention any names, but I decided that the Beatles were ready to go and seek new pastures. I asked them how they felt about Hamburg.

'We're rarin' to go.'

'There's fuck-all here in Liverpool . . .'

'Why not Hamburg?'

'Yeah, we can starve there as good as anywhere, Allan.'

A typical Beatles' reaction, cynical and somewhat aggressive. But they wanted to go. You had to learn to peel the surface grittiness away when you dealt with those four boys. So I wrote back to Bruno telling him that those Beatles I had been talking about were available and willing.

I also wrote a letter to Howie Casey, manager of Derry Wilkie and the Seniors, informing him that there was a likelihood of the Beatles going to Hamburg. I got a quick reply from Howie. I was shocked. He wrote back to the effect: 'Look, man, we've got a great fucking scene going here in Hamburg. Now you want to fuck it up by sending over that bum group, the Beatles. They're no fucking good. We don't want them here

and they will be bad for the scene. If you want to send another group, why not Rory Storm and the Hurricanes? A fucking good group, Allan. Don't send the fucking Beatles.'

Howie always was a bloke who liked to get straight to the point. He thought the Beatles weren't anywhere near ready for a place like Hamburg. I got the message loud and clear but I had other ideas.

If not the Beatles, who else? Gerry Marsden and the Pacemakers were then big in Liverpool, but they didn't want to get involved with the Hamburg venue. Rory and the Hurricanes were playing at Butlin's. Ringo Starr was their drummer, of course, the Beatles yet on the horizon for him.

I didn't want to upset Derry and Howie and the boys, but the Beatles had a right to take a bite at the cherry too. I felt they were ready. It would have been unfair to have kept them away from what I thought would be a great enlarging experience for them personally and certainly for the evolvement of their music.

The Beatles were still floundering about without a drummer. They were getting by, but getting nowhere as well. Summer was upon us. The sun shone all day and the nights, even round grubby old Slater Street, were perfumed with soft sea breezes. If you walked down Bold Street to the Kardomah Café, which was another hangout for the Beatles, your nostrils were filled with the sweet scent of the massed flowers on the street stalls. The nights were lazy and cool after the hot day and England as a whole basked and purred in a spell of glorious weather.

The crowd in the Jac sat around watching the long purple shadows slice down over the rooftops. The Beatles were there, feeling a bit down and saying when the fuck were they going to go to Hamburg.

'You can't go to Hamburg without a drummer,' I pointed out. They nodded in glum agreement. But why couldn't I fix them up with a drummer?

Drummers are like gold, the good ones. It's a demanding skill, a cross between athletics and artistry.

One night I was standing on the doorstep of the Jac enjoying the warm dusk of the rapidly approaching night. A pale silver moon showed its shy outline in a deepening purple sky. A big ship blasted its siren out on the Mersey. A crowd of night

people wandered past, shouting a greeting, making their way towards Bold Street. Across the street was a row of shops and offices, very old buildings, almost tumbledown. Now from the direction of this block came the sound of a drum. A drumbeat in the night, throbbing out its own rhythm, solo bliss.

As I listened, the drummer went into a whole series of rolls and riffs. He was good. I listened some more. He was damned good. Who was this mystery drummer in the night?

I went back into the Jac and called to the Beatles, 'Come out here, boys. I want you to listen to something.'

The Beatles trooped out on to the street.

'Listen.'

They listened to the lone drummer.

'He's bloody good, that guy.'

'Marvellous.'

'Who is he?'

'Go get him, Allan.'

Go get him. That was all very well. But I couldn't make out where the drumbeat was coming from. Somewhere across the road. But where exactly?'

'Can any of you guys pinpoint it?'

We walked up and down the street, knocking on doors.

John rapped on one door and an irate person stuck his head out of an upstairs window.

' 'Ere, what the 'ell's goin' on, you down there?'

John shouted back, 'Are you playing a drum, my friend?'

'Do I look as though I'm playing a fucking drum?'

'From where I stand,' shouted John, 'you don't look as though you're up to playing anything.'

The head disappeared and the window slammed down. Tangle with John Lennon? He must be mad.

Paul shouted into the night, 'Where are you, drummer man?'

At that moment the drumming stopped. Had the player heard our shouts, the sound of our quest?

Then it started up again. He was superb. Where oh where was this guy in the night?

Stuart called, 'Come out, come out, wherever you are, Mister Drummer Man . . .'

No reply. The drums carried on.

Most of the shops and offices were closed down dead at five at

night and normally there were only a few people left on the premises, perhaps in crummy one-room dirt-cheap living accommodations. The drumming stopped again. We waited, holding our breath, standing in a group in the middle of the street, our antennae wagging about. But the drumming was over for that night. Perhaps we would hear him again some other evening.

We needed this guy. He sounded like a loner, mad about the drums and getting enough practice to join a group. He could join the Beatles, if we could only find him.

'A bloody good drummer, that guy,' said John Lennon, as we walked back into the Jac.

'Bloody good,' agreed Paul McCartney.

'He's the best I've heard,' said George.

Stuart was also enthusiastic. 'Funny thing, isn't it, Allan? This one guy on his own, drumming away in some attic or whatever. Kind of poetic.'

'Yeah,' said I. 'It would be a bloody sight more poetic if we could track him down.'

Next night we listened out for the mystery man again.

'There he goes,' said Lennon, as we stood on the pavement outside the Jac. 'Listen to that, boys.' We froze and listened to the mystery drummer's efforts. He was even better than the night before.

We repeated our sleuthing efforts. What we needed was a sound scanner to track him down. We had just five sets of very fallible ears to depend on.

But this night we saw a light in an upstairs window over the National Cash Register shop on the opposite side of the road from the Jac.

'Hey, look, Al,' said George Harrison. 'Look at that light up there. It's the mystery drummer's light. I'll bet. We've got him.'

We jumped up and down in the street outside the National Cash Register shop shouting up at the lighted window.

'Hey, you up there,' shouted Paul. 'Hey, Mister Drummer Man, come on out.'

No reply. The drumming carried on.

John and George shouted in unison, 'Hey, hey, hey, come out, come out, whoever you are.'

'Go and bang on the door, Al,' said John.

So I hammered on the door while the Beatles kept on their bellowing up at the light. My knocking did the trick. The drumming stopped. The window flew up and a head appeared, framed by the light. We couldn't see his face.

'What's going on down there?' the head yelled. He obviously thought we were a gang of roughnecks trying to break in. If we weren't careful he would phone the police and we would all be in dead trouble. Caught red-handed or ham-fisted trying to break into the National Cash Register. That wouldn't look good in the papers.

'All right, boys,' I said to the Beatles. 'Quit shouting. I'll handle it.'

Then I said to the head, 'Look, we're a group of musicians and we need a drummer. Can you come down? We want to talk to you.'

The head said, 'Okay, I'll be right down.'

We heard his feet echoing along the corridor to the front door. The door opened and there he was. Our mystery drummer of Slater Street. He was a big guy, about six feet two, and spoke in a very quiet, gentle voice.

'Look, this is the Beatles. They're a Beat group and they've lost their regular drummer. How about it? Are you interested?'

'We think you're great,' said John Lennon.

The rest of the Beatles made noises of agreement and enthusiasm.

'Marvellous, man.'

'Lovely.'

'Gear.'

He was flattered and pleased.

He didn't work for the National Cash Register people. He was a picture-frame maker and renovator called Norman Chapman. His drumming was a hobby and he hadn't even sat in with a band up to that time.

Practising drumming can be a noisy business and not easy on the ear to people who wouldn't know a drum roll from a jam roll. So Norman brought his kit to work, and after everyone else had gone home for the night, he got down to practising.

'You think I'm good enough?'

'You bet.'

'You're as good as any we've heard, mate.'

'We just told you. We think you're the guy for us.'

'We're known as the Beatles. We play around Merseyside.'

'My name is Allan Williams and I'm their manager. The boys earn up to ten quid a night. You'll get an equal share of the dough. Are you interested?'

'I sure am. Christ, I could do with the money. Drum kits are bloody expensive. That'll help to pay off the money for the kit. Sure, you can count on me.'

Norman played with the Beatles for about three months, appearing with them several times in the basement of the Jac. George said about Norman recently, 'I remember him well, Norman Chapman. Big feller. Didn't talk much. In fact, I can't remember a word he ever said to me. He was a bloody good drummer, though, and that's for sure.'

Ringo knows about Norman Chapman. 'The boys told me they had this drummer they heard rehearsing all on his own. They thought a hell of a lot of him.'

Poor old Norman was another guy who missed latching on to a million quid by a quirk of fate. His stint with the Beatles ended when he was called up to do his compulsory two years' National Service with the First Battalion, King's Regiment. He saw service in Kenya and Kuwait, fighting terrorists. I met him over a Chinese meal the other night and we reminisced about old times.

'Yeah,' he said, referring to the Beatles, 'those guys really loved the game. You could tell even then that they had something special going for them. Everything they did and said was directed at making their sound better and better day by day. I remember Paul as the dominant figure, not John, oddly enough — although everyone nominates John as the leader.

'Maybe it was just my interpretation of it. One night when we were playing at the Grosvenor Ballroom over in Wallasey a fight broke out — fights were always breaking out. There were chairs flying through the air, bottles whizzing about and bodies hurtling in every direction.

'The police charged in and they were carting the bodies out and stacking them on the lawns outside. What a scene. We kept playing the music all the way through. John was hiding behind the curtain and laughing his head off and Paul was somehow

crouched under the piano. The music never stopped. What a night.

'John and Stuart were on a poetry kick at the time and they asked me to go down to London with them to play while some guy read his poetry out. I was married at the time so I didn't go with them.

'John's flat in Gambia Terrace was a scream of a place. It was so dirty and untidy. They never cleaned the ashes out of the fireplace and things got so bad the ashes stretched from the fireplace to the middle of the floor.

'It was just one of those things, me being called up for the army. I never rose above private, and when I came back to Liverpool the Beatles were getting really big so there was no opportunity for me to go back with them

'I sometimes think that maybe I should be rich now, but I had no control over the situation at the time so it doesn't really worry me. It's not as though I parted with the Beatles voluntarily.'

Norman now plays with a jazz group called the Saturated Seven, doing gigs around the Liverpool clubs. We often laugh about the night so long long ago when a crowd of lads who called themselves the Beatles hammered on the door of the National Cash Register Company in Slater Street.

Now you come to think of it, the words National Cash Register were quite appropriate to the fabulous earning power of the Beatles in their heyday.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Mean, moody and one of the Beatles

The Beatles were again without a drummer. But not for long. I got them a few gigs playing at a coffee bar in a suburb of Liverpool, Heymans Green.

This place was run by Mrs. Best, the very good-looking wife of Johnny Best, the late great boxing promoter who staged top-line bouts at the Liverpool Stadium. This was the same stadium where I put on my first big Beat concert, you will remember. Among that cheering and shrieking audience were the Beatles, still in the chrysalis stage and gawping at the big-timers like Rory Storm.

The Bests had a son called Pete. Pete Best was a skinny, moody dark-haired boy who immediately got along well with the Beatles. When they played at Mrs. Best's place, they let him sit in with them on the drums. This suited them fine because they didn't have a regular drummer and Pete was quite good on the skins. He wasn't featuring with them on their other gigs. But every time they played at the Best place he took over the vacant spot on the drums.

The first time I met him it was obvious that there was and would be no great rapport between him and me. There was no animosity or ill will, but just a blank wall between us. Perhaps it was something lacking in me. But I like to think this is not the case. I get along pretty well with most people I meet. (Except out-and-out villains and the violent types. I can't stand violence. I've seen enough blood to last me out.)

Anyway, as I was saying about Pete Best, the Beatles liked him and they considered making him their regular guy on drums. If it suited them, it was okay by me.

When the Hamburg deal was in the air I said to the Beatles: 'Boys, I am thinking of sending you to Hamburg. There's a new club opening there, run by Bruno Koschmider. But what about

a drummer? You can't go there without one. Old Bruno wouldn't like that. He's a bit of a stickler for the right thing.'

The Beatles were greatly excited at the prospect of going to the fabled Hamburg. They knew that Derry Wilkie and the Seniors were having a hectic and tremendously successful engagement there.

'As usual,' I went on, 'the same old story, no fucking drummer.'

We let the matter drop for that day. But from then on they took Pete in as a permanent member on the drums.

The Beatles broached the subject again a couple of days later. They were really keen to go to Hamburg.

Paul McCartney said, 'Now we've got Pete Best, the group's up to strength, Al. How about it?'

Stuart said, 'We really would love to go, Al, if you can arrange it.'

John: 'Go on, Al. Let's have a bash.'

George: 'I think we're ready for the big time, Al.' He grinned that lopsided George Harrison grin. He looks very sinister when he smiles, that George.

The Beatles knew I didn't get along with Pete. I made no bones about it. We simply had no dialogue. Pete had styled himself on Elvis Presley and Tony Curtis, with a long greasy lock of hair hanging over his forehead. He had this mean and moody image which came easy to him since he was mean and moody. Perhaps I didn't try hard enough with that boy, but I couldn't get many words out of him

His personality was directly opposed to those of the other Beatles. When they so desired, they could be outgoing, warmhearted — slightly, gently cynical, but basically kind.

True, Lennon had his acid, unforgiving wit to keep him warm. And he gave free rein to this side of his nature when he met a suitably defenceless whipping boy (the dimmer the better) from one of the other groups. He would release the flood-gates of his corrosive wit and watch his victims squirm. They were totally defenceless, inarticulate and dumb. And that's the way John liked them. He loved putting the mental boot in. A real fiend that boy could be. Then again, he was basically kindhearted. He would help anyone out. But he had his little ways, John.

The Beatles were getting really busy, playing at gigs all over Merseyside. I thought they were ready for Hamburg and their final baptism of hard and honing creative work.

Gerry Marsden and the Pacemakers were the tops at that time and my old pal Bob Wooler was their great champion. Bob was the best-known promoter, MC and disc jockey on Merseyside. By his complete fanatical dedication and fiery enthusiasm, he did more to propagate the Mersey Sound than any other bloke I know. If anyone undertakes a complete account of the Mersey Beat scene from beginning to end (has it really ended?), the name of Bob Wooler will be writ large. In fact, his name should be the largest writ. His contribution to the Sound was massive. Brian Epstein was a Johnny-come-lately compared with Bob. No group ever went to Bob and failed to receive a sympathetic ear and constructive advice.

Bob became the permanent disc jockey and MC at the Cavern in Mathew Street, Liverpool, when Ray McFall turned it into a Beat Mecca for kids throughout the world. What a character Bob is. At that time he carried around a diary in which he wrote down every interesting conversation he had with the groups and newspapermen on Merseyside.

Bob was a regular drinker at the old Liverpool Press Club in Lime Street. He often gave the newspapermen very good stories about the Beat scene. It wasn't until much later, when the scene became really big, that these same newspapermen realised that they had failed to see right under their noses the musical and social phenomenon that was being created in Liverpool. But in those days, if they went into their offices with stories about this new music that was driving the kids crazy in Liverpool, they would get the response, 'That's all very well, old boy. A bit bloody parochial, though, isn't it? Now listen, there's a good juicy murder case running at the Assize Court . . . I want you to get on over there right away . . . blah blah blah . . .'

Beatles, Schmeatles.

Bob has a peculiar nervous presence — like a frightened bird ready to take off and fly away at the first sign of impending danger. He is a very complex, beguiling bloke who shoots off puns and jazzes around with words all the time. If anyone should write the Big Book on the Mersey scene, it's dear old Bob. Perhaps he will get around to it some day. Or perhaps not.

Bob never made much money out of the scene. The last I heard, he was a bingo caller.

One night Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Beatles were on the same bill at a local hall. Bob and I went along there and I was hoping to impress him with the great strides the Beatles had made.

'You watch, Bob. You'll see who is the boss group now. It's the Beatles. You'll see.'

Bob was sceptical. 'Nah. It's Gerry and the boys. They're the tops. You watch.'

We both watched as Gerry went on and did his stuff. The boy was great. The group were truly magnificent. Very polished.

When the Beatles came on it was as though someone had pressed ever so gently on the nervous system of each and every boy and girl in that hall. They stood there, scruffy as hell, black wind-cheaters, black sweaters, worn-out shoes, shaggy hair, not giving a damn and showing it in their loose posture. But they gave off an animal charge which wound up the audience like a tight watch spring. Then *wham*! The spring was released and it all hung out, emotion spilled over, swamped the Beatles and engulfed them.

As they played, the Beatles formed a solid bridge of feeling between themselves and their audience. It was as though the Beatles and the boys and girls in the audience were one in a gigantic egg. There was something supernatural about it. They had a greatness about them which got through to me that night as never before.

'There you are, Bob — how about that for a group? They're special. Yeah?'

But Bob, loyal as always, preferred the Pacemakers. Not for long. He was to become the Beatles' biggest champion.

I had decided to ignore Howie Casey's nasty letter about the Beatles. Bruno Koschmider was keen for the boys to go to the Indra, his other club in the Reeperbahn area. He wanted them for a two-month engagement at one hundred and fifty quid a week. I told him he could have them and that I would drive them over personally. The contract was to begin on Wednesday, 18th August, 1960, and to end on Sunday, 16th October.

The contract stated that they would play from eight o'clock in the evening to nine-thirty. They would get a break of half an

hour till ten. Then they would be back on stage till eleven. Another pause (pronounced 'powzer' in German) of half an hour, followed by a playing stint of one hour, taking the time up to thirty minutes after midnight. At that time of night the Reeperbahn is just beginning to swing. A break, then back on stage until two o'clock in the morning.

A hard day's night, to use their own phrase. A lotta sweat. It was going to be the making of the Beatles. My fee was ten pounds a week as their manager and agent. Big deal.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Ho hum, what a bunch

We almost didn't go to Hamburg at all. At a very late stage we had an awful lot of trouble getting John Lennon a passport. His mother was dead and his father missing. He lived with his Auntie Mimi. I had to rush around to vicars and policemen and magistrates in a desperate operation to get all the paperwork done before the passport could be issued.

The Beatles didn't have enough money to go to Hamburg by train so I got this battered green and cream van which I hoped would get us all there. There were Beryl, my wife; Barry, her brother; Lord Woodbine, coming along for kicks, as usual; John, George, Paul, Stuart, and mean and moody Pete Best. Quite a load for a clapped-out old van. And on the way through London to the Channel ferry we were to pick up Herr Steiner from the Heaven and Hell coffee bar. Steiner was going to Hamburg to work for Bruno Koschmider as interpreter.

So this was the start of our historic trip. With all the Beatles' equipment and ten people on board, we weren't exactly travelling in Pullman style. But it was cheap. We figured on keeping our fingers crossed.

The Beatles were so broke they asked me for an advance.

Paul said, 'Look, Al, we need money to buy some bits and pieces, clothes and toothbrushes and things. How about giving us a few quid till we get into our stride over there? You'll get it back. You know us.'

Yeah, I knew them. They were all good boys. They'd pay me back — if they remembered. So I gave them fifteen quid among them. I still have the receipt. It is written on Jacaranda Enterprises notepaper. (The Jacaranda Enterprises was my business name for handling groups.) It says: 'A. R. Williams' — the R is for Richard, in case you're interested — '23 Slater Street, Liverpool 1. Received from Allan Williams the sum of £15 part

payment of proposed engagement in Hamburg. To be deducted.' It was signed by Stuart Sutcliffe and Paul McCartney 'on behalf of The Beatles'.

All official. What a scream when you think of the dough that was to pass through their hands in the years to come.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when the Beatles turned up, lugging their pathetically few belongings in battered gaping suitcases and bags. A motley crew, sir. Damned motley.

They didn't have many spare clothes — perhaps a couple of changes of underwear, a few shirts and sweaters. For the Hamburg engagement they had bought some new black sweaters from Marks and Spencer's and even some extra baseball shoes for stage work (usually they wore their baseball or gym shoes till they dropped off their feet). Class, real class, these boys.

Paul had a short coat with a fur collar turned up. Stuart had a thick sweater, and, as usual, wore his James Dean dark glasses. We were all in nondescript gear, ready for a rough ride over there.

Luckily, the van had a roofrack, or we would have had a hell of a cramped trip to Hamburg. We stacked a lot of the gear on the roof and decided we would travel three in the front and seven in the back, sitting on side benches. The remaining floor space was used to stow belongings.

I had put a small spirit stove on board so we could have a brew-up of tea on the roadside. This way, I figured, we could save money. We intended to buy bread and cheese on the way, and maybe a glass of beer at a pub or café. We had to economise. Lack of money was endemic to our way of living in those days. Everything was done on a shoestring.

The lads were making excited noises about their first trip out of England.

'Well, this is it.'

'Let's get the show on the road.'

'There's no business like show business,' said some wag.

'Hamburg, here we come.'

'Hamburg, here we hope we come,' corrected someone else.

Beryl fussed about checking on everything and Lord Woodbine just stood there laughing at some private joke.

'Man' — he slapped his thigh — 'what a hell of a trip to make. I mean — why Hamburg and the Beatles? It's mad, mad, mad.'

On reflection, I suppose it was almost a surreal situation. Here was I, an ex-plumber, an ex- a lot of things — onetime door-to-door salesman, flogger of junk jewellery — a tiny black-haired frustrated singer going to Hamburg with five young Liverpool lads who had hardly a bean between them. Just to top it all off, we had aboard Lord Woodbine, the famous calypso singer from Port of Spain and Liverpool 8.

Ho hum, what a bunch. Let's get the show on the road, like the man said.

The Beatles had asked me to get their names painted on the side of the cream and green van to let everyone know they were heading out of town, that they were on the move. They had a 'hit or bust' spirit. I hadn't managed to get this done, but they were determined to get some sort of publicity on the battered sides of the van. So they went into the Jac and cajoled the staff into mixing a paste out of flour and water. They cut headlines out of some old newspapers they dug up from the dustbins which lined Slater Street and assembled the words 'The Beatles' and their five names. These bits of newspapers were slapped on to the van with a liberal and messy application of flour and water. The Beatles stood back and admired their work.

'Bloody marvellous.'

'That's us, folks, the famous Beatles.'

'Looks like a bloody tatty job to me.'

'Bet it comes off in the first drop of rain.'

'No, it'll stick like shit to a blanket, that stuff.'

After we got the van packed and everyone seated, I said, 'Right, we'll all drive round the block to see how the van feels.'

I wanted to check that the load was balanced and that the brakes were sufficiently powerful to pull up with all the excess weight. We went down Bold Street and up Lime Street and back safely enough, with me pumping the footbrake, testing, testing.

Despite the testing, I had grave misgivings about the van. I had never driven on the Continent before. They drove on the 'wrong' side of the road there — the right. That would be another difficulty I wasn't looking forward to on this trip. But I was sure we would survive. The Beatles didn't give any of this a second thought. They were too excited to care about anything.

The Beatles left unsung, but cried over. A mother's copious

tears were even then being wept in a nearby shop doorway. Unknown to us, Stuart Sutcliffe's mother Millie was standing in a shop entrance in Slater Street crying her heart out about her little boy Stuart going all the way to Hamburg and away from his ever-loving mum. She said later that she didn't want to create a scene, and upset Stuart into the bargain. So they had said with farewells at home and Stuart had left. But he didn't know that Millie had followed at a discreet distance to watch over her boy till the last moment. So there she was, this lone woman, sobbing and dabbing her eyes, watching the preparations for the trip.

We had no work permits and the lads were going into Germany in the guise of students. I must say they looked more the part than had Derry Wilkie and his boys.

Now that the big moment had come, I was anxious to get the rickety old wheels turning on our caravan. We were off at last, heading for the Channel coast and the ferry. As we drove off down Slater Street, a crowd of lads raised a derisive ragged cheer when they saw the Beatles' name stuck with flour and paste to the van's flaking flanks.

'Make way for the famous Beatles' road show,' they shouted.

'Goodbye, Liverpool. Hello, Hamburg.'

'Oh Maggie, Maggie May, they have taken her away and she'll never walk to Hamburg any more,' they sang out, someone beating time on a guitar case.

The route we took to London was the old A5 main road and on to Watling Street. On the way we pulled up at a lay-by. I got the spirit stove out and brewed us all a cup of tea.

We ate the sandwiches the girls in the Jac had made up for us in the pleasant summer sun and the boys went for a romp in a nearby meadow, playing cowboys and Indians, running around whooping in the dappled, sweet-smelling field.

I went over the van, checking on the gear on the roof, worrying about wheels falling off, *et cetera, et cetera.* The Beatles didn't give a damn, they were having a ball playing games in the sunlit field. Happy, happy days for us all. Kids out on a jaunt, a merry wheeze.

We got back on the road and drove into London to pick up Herr Steiner. He was waiting with his kit all packed in a neat pile outside the Heaven and Hell. He had a hell of a shock when

he saw how heavily the van was loaded. A very meticulous, correct sort of guy was Herr Steiner. But he jumped aboard and we headed out of London on to the Newhaven road, Newhaven being the Channel port.

Out through Fulham we trundled, Mitcham, Croydon, Coulsdon, Caterham, Blindley Heath, New Chapel, Felbridge, East Grinstead, Forest Row, took a right turn at Wych Cross and on to Danehill, Furner's Green, Haywards Heath, Chailey, Cooksbridge, Lewes, on over the rolling downs and into Newhaven.

We made it just in time for the night ferry.

The stevedores gave us a severe shock. They took one long look at the van with the luggage and musical kit on top and shook their rugged heads.

'Now this,' said the boss ganger, 'looks like it's gonna be a tough one, boys.'

Lennon said, 'Yeah? Why's that, mate?'

The boss ganger stared at this Liverpool youth and seemed to take to something about the cut of his jib.

'Well, we don't handle many vans like this with all that stuff piled on top. We might not be able to get it into the crane sling.'

'Come on,' pleaded Lennon. 'Give it a go, mate. This ship's about to pull out.'

The boss ganger shouted some orders and the crane jib swung out over our van, its long arm dark against the night sky.

'Let's try it then, boys,' said the boss.

In a second our rickety van was being manhandled about by a dozen tough dockers. They got the slings round the van all right. But the van was top-heavy without passengers inside. When the crane gently raised the sling with the van in it, there was a very nasty moment indeed. The van pitched sideways, then settled against the nets and slings like a tired old lady easing herself into her favourite fireside chair. They swung her aboard without mishap. We rushed aboard to see her being lowered into the hold. We breathed again. The Beatles had been worried stiff about their guitars and kit.

'Thank Christ for that.'

'Bloody hell, that was a close one.'

'Let's hope the guys over on the other side can get it off again.'

'Get it on, they can get it off.'

'Keep your fingers crossed.'

The boys ran around the ship investigating the various places — the bars, the lounges, finally eyeing the benches on which we would spend the night trying to sleep.

They had kipped down in worse places than that. Lord Woodbine's cellar, for one. Sleeping rough didn't worry those boys. They could sleep on a clothes-line.

We stood at the ship's side — the five Liverpool lads; my Chinese wife; Lord Woodbine, the West Indian calypso singer; Herr Steiner, the correct German; and Barry, my Chinese brother-in-law. Quite a varied little throng watching the dark outline of England disappearing across the dark water.

One of the Beatles began singing softly the words of 'Bye Bye Blackbird', that nostalgic little song. We all joined in.

Pack up all your cares and woe, here we go singing low, bye bye blackbird . . . No one here can love or understand me, oh what hard luck stories they all hand me . . . Pack up all your cares and woe, here we go singing low, blackbird, bye bye . . . So make my bed and light the light . . . I'll be home late tonight . . . Blackbird, bye bye.

We trooped into the lounge and settled down to sleep on the hard benches.

'Good night, boys.'

'Good night, Al.'

'Night, John. Night, Paul. Night, Stu. Night, Pete . . .'

Night night all.

The ferry chugged on across the smooth sea heading for the Hook of Holland. We were about halfway to Hamburg. I think we all slept quite well. Up to then it had been hard travelling.

We awoke with the morning light and the Hook of Holland appearing on the port bow. This was the Beatles' first sight of the Continent. They rubbed the sleep from their eyes, dashed some cold water into their faces and looked out eagerly across the water to the promised land.

'Looks just like England.'

'Bloody hell, isn't it flat?'

'So these are foreigners?'

'They look normal.'

'Just like us.'

I hoped we would not have any dangerous moments unshipping the van.

We got off the ship when she docked and stood about the quay awaiting fearfully to see how the van would be handled. They would have to get it off somehow, having once got it on.

The van was swung on to the quay with no bother at all. But we watched with our hearts in our mouths till its wheels touched the ground. All there in one piece. Thank God.

We felt like kissing the hairy dockers. They had handled the van like the Crown Jewels. If we had but known, those instruments were to become worth their weight in gold.

Our next obstacle was the Dutch immigration people. I don't know how gullible we thought they were when we concocted our students story, but now the Beatles' magnetic personalities came into action. They could charm the birds off the trees when they felt like it.

As usual, Lennon led the action. John borrowed one of the official's hats and strutted about. The boys turned everything into a joke and we got through with no bother. Some band of students.

We were in Europe.

Going through the Hague, I was not used to the right-hand traffic and I nearly rammed a taxi, which screeched out of the way at the last minute. But the Dutch are used to the crazy English driving on the wrong side of the road. A good job they are.

Suddenly we were surrounded by swarms of cyclists, droves of them, all on their way to work. They were charming, healthy-looking, pink-faced, scrubbed clean. When we pulled up at a set of traffic lights, they of course pulled up too. They put their arms out and leaned on the van, waiting for the lights to change to green. So many of them put their hands against the van sides that we were rocked about alarmingly.

The Beatles stuck their tousled heads out of the side windows and smiling said things like —

'Fuck off, mate.'

'Get your bloody hands off the van.'

'Quit rocking the bloody boat, pal.'

'Why don't you piss off?'

'Goorrr, look at that gorgeous beast there.'

The Dutch people smiled right on and nodded, greeting us in their language.

When we got through the lights I made another driving error by going round a traffic island the wrong way (another typical mistake of the Englishman driving on the Continent for the first time). There just happened to be a gigantic truck coming in the opposite direction. I swung the wheel hard round and on to the verge. The truck thundered on, horn blaring, a fist waving out of the window. Crazy fucking English. They'll kill us all.

I had to get the hang of driving on the wrong side of the road. Fast.

The Beatles shouted encouragement to me and we made progress out into the flat lands of Holland. Then we were all at once hopelessly lost. Every Dutchman we asked came up with a different set of directions. And just my luck — two people I asked were deaf-mutes. Two on the trot. Beat that. Or if they weren't deaf-mutes, they were struck temporarily that way by our motley appearance.

Really, we didn't give a damn. Woody was trying to brew a cup of tea while sitting in the front passenger seat. One of the Beatles was twanging his guitar. The sun came out. The van was running like a dream. We were in love with life and we would make it to Hamburg by crook or by Hook of Holland.

I was beginning to get the hang of driving on the wrong side of the road and the smell of the fresh Dutch countryside was enchanting. We relaxed.

The Beatles were exclaiming continuously:

'Look, it's just like a picture postcard.'

'Like in the picture books at school.'

'Where are all those fucking tulips we read about?'

'And the windmills.'

'I see no windmills.'

'There's one.'

'This is all too good for the Dutch.'

It was very odd, but during that trip to Hamburg it seemed that we were indeed setting off a chain reaction to greatness. I know this sounds far-fetched, but I felt I was truly doing

something momentous. It was as though my soul could reach ahead in time and see the shattering events of the next few years in the Beatles' history. You might scoff. For after all, they were just five kids with a yen to make music. But there it is. I experienced this sensation of being instrumental in a major event.

We came to a signpost pointing to Arnhem, where many soldiers of the British Army fought a forlorn battle during the last World War. From what I hear, they achieved nothing but glory. Ain't that the way with wars? Nothing good ever came out of a war except the spectacle of brave men dying bravely but stupidly.

I thought it was about time to stop for something to eat. We had bought some bread and cheese on the way and we could maybe brew up. A hot drink would do us all good.

I pulled up alongside the Arnhem memorial, which bears the words 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore'. My wife's brother Barry had his camera with him, and after we had eaten our bread and cheese he took our photograph with the memorial in the background.

I was greatly moved to witness the rows upon rows of tiny white crosses, each cross marking the death of a British soldier in this foreign land. I thought of their flesh and bones nurturing the lush green fatness of the Dutch countryside. Fertiliser. Waste. I cried. I turned away and dabbed my eyes so the others couldn't see. I didn't want them to think I was some sort of a sissy.

John Lennon didn't even get out of the van. This certainly wasn't his scene.

'I'm not interested in this sort of thing. It's all wrong.'

He felt the same way as I did — that war is a waste and these men should not have died. But all the same, I was amazed that feeling the way he did, he didn't want to get out and see the evidence of such calamitous folly.

I called Lennon some nasty names under my breath. Looking back, I suppose he was right and I was wrong. I should have driven on instead of having a good old wallow in the terribly tragic atmosphere of the place. Still, that was John — contrary, cynical, blasé beyond his tender years. He hardly ever appeared to me to be a boy as the others were. More a young old man.

Sneering, jibing, prodding people mentally, prickly, often very, very funny in an offbeat way. He dominated the boys. In fact, he spread his rather baleful and disturbing presence wherever he went. Genius comes in odd packages. Not the least of the odd packages being one John Lennon. Dear John.

The rest of the boys were duly impressed in their various ways. 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore' said the inscription on the Arnhem memorial. Indeed, the Beatles' names will also live for evermore. What a portent for the future that we should have stopped at that spot. Because had we lost our way, really?

Arnhem was quite a pleasant town so we stopped for a stroll around its picturesque streets. The day was hot and pleasant, bees buzzed in the air as we walked down a tree-lined street, watching the people hurrying about their daily chores. Wandering down a side street, we came upon a record and music shop. The Beatles walked in while I stayed outside with Beryl and Lord Woodbine and Barry. I should have gone in with them.

When they came out a few minutes later they had a guilty, excited look about them. Like naughty boys who have made a successful and rewarding raid on the cookie jar.

I took one look at their faces and said, 'What's up, lads? What is it? What's going on?'

We could get by without any trouble on this trip. Here we were with no work permits, masquerading as students. The last thing we wanted was trouble with the authorities. I smelt a rat.

Lennon looked around him to see if anyone was watching. Then he pulled a large, expensive mouth organ from his jacket pocket.

'How about that, boys?' he said showing it round.

'Where the hell you get that, John? You haven't any money, have you?'

I knew bloody well he hadn't. He knew I knew this.

'I just got it, didn't I?'

'You took it. You stole it,' I challenged.

Lennon stared at me arrogantly with those steely eyes of his.

'You bloody well stole it, didn't you?' I carried on. 'Here we are in a strange country, posing as students, and you do a stupid thing like that. Jesus Christ. Shoplifting.'

I made a face. Lennon didn't reply. He stuck the mouth organ back in his pocket.

'Yeah,' he said, 'I stole it.'

'You're fucking ridiculous,' I said bitterly. 'Why did you do it, John? You could have jeopardised the whole bloody trip. I would have bought you a mouth organ if you'd asked me properly.'

'I'll bet,' said Lennon, not even a little bit put out. He was using his brass face, the you-can't-bug-me expression.

'Ah, what's the fucking use?' I said to no one in particular. 'You can't fucking win.'

But they were only boys. It was a boyish trick, not the act of a thief. John Lennon could never be that. He could be a lot of things, but not a thief.

Who among us can truthfully say that as a boy he hasn't done something quite against the law? I remember going into Woolworth's and knocking off stuff from the sweet counter. In fact, I did a lot of that when I was a kid. I used to specialise in electrical goods. They weren't an earthly bit of use to me. I just did it for kicks, for excitement, for danger. To combat boredom. But Lennon's mouth organ would be of great use to the group. He mastered the instrument in no time at all.

'Righto, lads,' I said, 'let's be going. We can't take the mouth organ back to the shop. They might call the police, then we'd be in real trouble. Let's get away from this place before we get nicked. That's all we need — to end up in jail in Arnhem.'

'Okay, Al,' they said, a little chastened, but not much.

I drove out of Arnhem with a prayer in my heart that the shopkeeper would not discover the theft and ask the police to stop us on the road. We got out without further incident.

We drove along in silence for a while.

'Come on,' said George, trying to lighten the atmosphere that had descended on us over the mouth organ. 'Let's have a song.'

It seemed like a good idea. We couldn't go on in that icy antagonism for much longer. We had to rub along together. I couldn't go on being angry with John Lennon for ever. It wouldn't work.

So things brightened up a bit. Lennon pulled out his new shiny mouth organ and after a few experimental trills he could play it pretty well. Got music in his soul, that boy.

There were ten of us and we broke into a few naughty chor-

uses of 'Maggie May', that well-known Liverpool lay. We must have made a hell of a racket, even above the roar of the engine and the rest of the traffic, because people turned in the streets to wave and shout.

Over the border into Germany we went with no trouble at all from the customs and immigration. They swallowed the line that we were merely students going to see our friends in Hamburg. The guitars? They were merely for the evening sing-songs we were looking forward to.

'The Germans are a very musical nation, are they not, *mein Herr*?'

'*Ja, ja,*' said the customs official, waving us on through.

Just over the border we got the wheels of the van stuck in a set of tram lines. By this time Lord Woodbine had taken over the driving for a while to give me a breather.

I said, 'What the fuck's up, Woody? You gonna get us all killed?'

'For Christ's sake,' said Woody, wrestling with the wheel, 'I don't know what's gone wrong with this thing.'

The Beatles exhorted Woody to get the van out of the rut.

'Come on, Woody, git it moving.'

'Give it the gun, Woody.'

'Bloody hell, what the fuck are you doing?'

'Get it out, move it on.'

'Watch out, Woody, here comes a fucking tram . . .'

There was a yelp of fear in that voice, for a tram was indeed heading straight for us. Smoke came from the rear wheels as Lord Woodbine frantically revved the engine. It looked as though we were going to be wiped out.

The tram was clanging its bell and we could see sparks shooting up from its great steel wheels as the driver slammed on his brakes. I screamed at Lord Woodbine, who had sweat popping out on his black brow, 'Do something. Get us out of here. We'll all be killed. DO SOMETHING!' My voice broke with sheer panic.

Then, just as the tram seemed to be about to slam into us — Goodbye Hamburg, hello the morgue — Lord Woodbine managed to get the van moving. It shot out of the tram lines like a bullet and careered across the road. The tram roared past, sparks showering from its wheels, white faces peering from its windows.

We couldn't figure out what had caused the van wheels to stick in the tram lines. We didn't care. We were out and safe. Lord Woodbine relinquished the wheel until he could get his nerves back to normal.

On we went. Hamburg, Hamburg. Would we ever make it in one piece? I was beginning to doubt it.

We arrived at last in Hamburg that night. While we were looking for the Grosse Freiheitstrasse — the street off the Reeperbahn red-light district where the Indra and Kaiserkeller were situated — I rammed a car driven by a German lady.

Trouble, trouble, trouble, even at the very last minute. I said to the Beatles, 'This is it, boys. The first thing we're gonna see in Hamburg is the inside of their jail.'

'Don't say that, Al.'

'Bloody hell, what a trip.'

'Talk about luck.'

'Watch out, Al, here she comes.'

'She seems like a very nice German lady, *jawohl*.'

These guys would joke on the rim of hell.

She was a very nice person. Luckily, I hadn't done much damage. She made light of it and indeed spent a great deal of time setting us on the right road.

We pulled up in the Grosse Freiheitstrasse as the strip-club lights were coming on and the prostitutes beginning their nightly parade looking for custom. The streets were swarming with all the rag-tag and bobtail of human existence. Dope fiends, pimps, hustlers for the strip clubs and clip joints, gangsters, musicians, transvestites, plain ordinary homosexuals, dirty old men, dirty young men, women looking for women. In the shops you could buy guns, daggers, handcuffs, whips, coshes, knuckle dusters, even hand grenades, if you went about it the right way. You could buy anybody or anything in Hamburg 4 district.

The Beatles climbed down out of the van to stretch their cramped legs. They breathed the air of sleazy Hamburg, looked around, their eyes popping. They took to it immediately. It was their kind of town, all right, all right.

'Look at all the lights.'

'Look at that guy there in women's clothes.'

'What's he doing in that gear?'

I had to explain about transvestites. It was all new to them.

'A trans what?'

'Talk about kinky. Wow.'

'What a hell of a town, Al.'

I led them all into the Kaiserkeller at one end of the Grosse Freiheit. Bruno was knocked out to see them.

The Beatles were also knocked out to see what a fabulous club the Kaiserkeller was. I had to keep reminding them that they weren't booked for the Kaiserkeller, but for Koschmider's other place, the Indra.

'Ah, so,' said Bruno, 'these are the famous Beatles?' He was talking through Herr Steiner. Bruno gave us a very warm welcome. He was at once bowled over by the Beatles' personalities. They had on him the same effect they were to have on Brian Epstein. He found them magnetic and he was to become obsessively jealous of them. But all that was in the hectic future. Now the boys shook his hand and the ex-circus clown beamed as they made highly complimentary remarks about his club.

Derry Wilkie and Howie Casey and the boys were there waiting to go onstage. Howie gave the Beatles a rather cool reception because he didn't rate them very highly as a group. Howie wasn't being as unpleasant as it might appear; he and Derry had high standards and they didn't realise how much the Beatles had progressed and developed since they'd heard them. Also, he thought I might have told them about his critical letter, though I hadn't because I didn't want to create bad blood or rock the boat so early in the game. I was quite sure he and Derry would have a very warm and great regard for the Beatles once they heard them do their stuff.

But at that moment they thought the Beatles were a bit of a joke. Howie was quite delighted to point out to the Beatles that they were not going to play at the superior Kaiserkeller but at the Indra.

'You're on at the Indra, a fucking strip club,' said Howie. I pointed out that was untrue. It was a *former* strip club. Bruno had seen what an infusion of Liverpool sound could do in drumming up custom, so strip was out and the Beatles were in.

The Beatles couldn't hide their disappointment when they heard those dreaded words 'strip club'.

'Listen, Al, we had enough strip in the New Cabaret Artists joint.'

'Yeah, we've had enough of that type of thing.'

'We didn't come all this way for backing strippers.'

'No, Allan, no, no, no.'

I again pointed out that this was not the case. There would be no strippers.

'Let's just take things as they come, lads. I wouldn't do that to you, and Herr Koschmider' — indicating Bruno — 'would not go back on his word.'

'Don't worry, Beatles,' he said. 'There are no more strippers there. Be sure of that.'

The Beatles expressed relief and returned to their high spirits and began to ask Derry and Howie about the night life, the broads, the booze.

'Everything you want, you can have,' was the answer from Derry. Derry, it was obvious, wanted everything and was getting it with no trouble.

The Beatles stated that they would like some of the same, please. They were good red-blooded boys and they would reach out with both hands for the goodies offered by the Reeperbahn and Grosse Freiheit areas.

We went out into the Grosse Freiheit with Bruno and Herr Steiner. He led us down to the Indra. The entrance was not lit up like the rest of the street and presented a gloomy face.

'Hey, Al, where's our big billing?'

'Can't see anything about any bloody Beatles, Al.'

'Nobody's gonna find us here.'

'Nobody will even know we're here.'

'We should have brought our own posters and stuck 'em up.'

'Yeah,' I had to admit, 'it is a bit disappointing.'

Bruno made gentling noises and we walked into the foyer where John struck a match and peered about in the flickering shadows.

'There you are,' I said triumphantly. 'There's your billing. Not bad, eh?'

It wasn't that good, either. In the guttering flame from Lennon's dying match we saw some tiny notices which said, 'The Fabulous Beatles from Liverpool, England'. The match

went out and I felt the Beatles' disappointment as we stood there in the gloom of the foyer.

'Okay, boys?' said Bruno quite cheerfully, not noticing that the Beatles had expected greater blurbs on the walls.

'Yeah, yeah,' grunted one.

'Could have been outside in lights.'

'It will be, it will be. You'll see.'

'Wish we were playing at the Kaiserkeller.'

'Don't like this place much.'

'Ah, well,' said I, 'let's give it a whirl, boys.'

The trouble with the Indra was that the regulars went there to watch strip. It just wasn't a rock'n'roll joint. But a deal was a deal. My main aim was to get the Beatles into Hamburg. I knew they would take it from there. Their music was right for the place. Hamburg was another Liverpool, more rumbustious and openly catering for what some people call the vice trade and what I call catering for ordinary sexual appetites which are crippled by our narrow society.

Bruno next took us to a nearby cinema.

'Here, Al, we don't want to go to the movies.'

'Perhaps they want us to play for the silent movies.'

'Mack Sennett, W. C. Fields.'

'Let's go and see the rest of the town.'

'We don't want to go to the movies, Al.'

'I don't think he's going to show us a film, lads. Perhaps it's your living quarters somewhere around.'

My guess was too right. If we hadn't been so tired, and at the same time elated from finally arriving in Hamburg, there might have been an unpleasant scene.

The accommodation (for want of a better word) was three dusty, littered dressing-rooms at the rear of the cinema. The cinema had been converted from a theatre and the dressing-rooms had not been used for donkey's years. This, then, was the new home of the Beatles. I didn't know what to say. We couldn't back out now. Or could we? Beryl, Lord Woodbine, Barry and I were going to look for a cheap hotel. We had about enough cash for a while if we were very, very careful. The Beatles had hardly a bean among them. They had to make do with this flop-house.

There was a film running at the time and we could hear the

sound track booming out and watch the flickering pictures on the back of the screen. Rather a weird experience.

'Al, what have we done to deserve this lot?'

'Home sweet home.'

'Break the news to muvver, tell her that I love her, tell her that I'll never more roam.'

'It's not fit for pigs.'

'I bet there's not even any hot water.'

I looked at the Beatles in sorrow.

Lennon said, 'Al, what does this bloke think we are—animals?'

'I'm sorry, boys. What more can I say? Shall I tell him it's not suitable?'

Not suitable? It was a bloody insult. I could have cried for the lads there and then. They were only kids and this was their new home.

'This is okay, *ja*?' said Bruno. This was not okay, *nein*. I glowered around the place, taking in the cracked washbasins, the complete lack of furniture except for a spindly chair here and there, the thick dust, the filth on the walls.

'Not really,' I said. I should have refused to let the Beatles stay there. But much to my surprise, they told me not to make any trouble.

'Let's just see how everything else goes, Al.'

'Let's get playing the music and see what happens.'

'Who knows, we might be able to rent some better place.'

'Yeah, we'll give it a try, Al.'

'It's not your fault.'

So I simmered down and said to Bruno, 'I suppose it'll have to do for a while.'

Bruno said, 'I'll get some furniture in. My men are coming now with some beds.'

Sure enough, a gang of beefy bouncers from the Kaiserkeller filed in, lugging with them half a dozen camp beds and some mouldy old blankets. The Beatles' beds. Happy dreams, boys.

So that was the Beatles' first home in Hamburg—three squalid ratholes, dusty, dark and dirty, behind a cinema screen. Out front, hundreds of people watched celluloid dreams. Round the back, the group called the Beatles, who were to become the biggest thing in the history of entertainment, rested

their tired mopheads. When they wanted to shave they had to go over to the Kaiserkeller and draw mugs of hot water from the toilet taps.

But that night they still had work to do. They saw to it that their camp beds were laid out, ready for a night's rest when they came off stage. They took one last look around, picked up their instruments and said to Koschmider, 'Okay, we're ready to go on'.

Ethel Merman would have been proud of them.

At the Indra the clients had, of course, come to see a girlie show. Word hadn't yet got around that there were no girls any more and a Beat group called the Beatles from Liverpool was the star attraction.

The decor was all wrong — wall-to-wall carpeting and heavy drape curtains which soaked up the vibrancy of the boys' music. The stage was too tiny and restricting. Disaster.

They did their best but the clients weren't interested. Bring on the girls, they said. They felt cheated. The scene did the boys no good at all.

I went there for a few nights, hoping things would pick up. No chance.

To aggravate matters there was a crotchety old woman living in a flat over the Indra. When strip was going on, there wasn't a great deal of noise. But she immediately complained about the racket after the Beatles opened up. Even with the muffling curtains and carpets, the noise was too much for her old ears. She told the police. She told Bruno. And Bruno told me something had to be done to keep the music quiet.

I told him that he knew rock'n'roll was loud stuff. What did he expect from the Beatles, chamber music? But I agreed to tell the boys to try and quiet things down.

'What does Bruno think we are? Fucking performing mice?'

'How do you play Beat music soft?'

'He knew what he was getting.'

'Come off it, Al, the man's crazy.'

'Who is this old bag who's complaining?'

'Don't blame me, boys. I'm only passing the message on. I know you can't do your stuff any differently.'

We didn't know what to do. The Beatles were cut up about it and so was I. On the small stage they couldn't move. They

couldn't play their music right because of the old hag getting on the phone to the police every hour on the hour. And Bruno was scared stiff of the police leaning on him.

The Beatles only played at the Indra for a week before Bruno switched back to strip. One couldn't blame him. He knew that rock'n'roll was the wrong thing for that place. But he had tried.

I suppose the old baggage over the strip club went back to her knitting when the naked ladies returned. I bet she was a church-going God-botherer. You gotta laugh.

Bruno Koschmider said the Beatles could go on at the Kaiserkeller, splitting the bill with Derry Wilkie and the Seniors. The boys were delighted.

'Marvellous news, Al.'

'That's the place for us.'

'We knew that fucking Indra couldn't last.'

'We'll blast Derry and his boys off the stage.'

'Bad cess to the Indra and that fucking old crone.'

'This is it, lads,' I said, back in good spirits once more.

Now a very strange thing happened. The Beatles had complained about the Indra's small stage restricting their movements. But on the Kaiserkeller's much bigger stage, they seemed to freeze to the spot.

When I went in to watch them perform at the Kaiserkeller I shouted at them on stage, 'Come on, boys, make a show, move it about a bit. Shake a leg.'

The German audience took up my shout and it soon became a late-night rallying call all over the Reeperbahn: 'Mak show.' 'Mak' was the nearest the Germans could come to the English 'make'.

'Mak show, Beatles, mak show, boys.'

The Beatles were a great success and they soon had their own following of late-night people. They were blooming into the biggest draw in Hamburg's night life.

Koschmider loved them. But he always liked to have a little moan, something to complain about. As I said, he became obsessive about the Beatles in the same way Epstein did — overprotective, like an over-loving smothering mother.

For instance, he disliked the fact that the Beatles sometimes didn't move about on stage. After I went back to Liverpool he wrote me a letter saying that I should get them to always 'mak

show'. He also complained that the Beatles were talking about taking a holiday. All Bruno wanted was more work from them.

Bruno also wanted to extend their contracts to the end of the year on the same terms. This was agreed upon, but only after I had written the following letter to the Beatles, dated 21st September, 1960:

The Beatles
c/o Kaiserkeller
Gre Freiheit 36
Hamburg, St. Pauli
Germany.

Dear All —

I am very pleased to hear that your engagement is proving satisfactory to all concerned.

I must add a touch of regret that you did not take seriously to the proven fact that your playing was too loud for the Indra. I cannot blame you wholly for this because one cannot expect rock and roll bands to play as you would in a morgue but for the sake of Mr. Koschmider I beg you to listen to all he tells you. He asks if you want your tour extended.

I understand that you only move around the stage when there is no audience — this is stupid and a suicidal attitude for any band to adopt.

I have always pointed out that the public expect and enjoy a band which can move as well as play good music. I am telling you this because as you know, I am sending Rory Storm and the Hurricanes.

They have no inhibitions whatsoever. And it would hurt me deeply, personally, if it came to my ears that you were no longer in the running and I am afraid this will be so if you carry on in your present casual manner.

I earnestly hope you take my advice to heart as this is very serious and could upset your future in Germany and indeed, with me.

I don't know whether the work is too hard for your but I am amazed to hear from you that you intend to take a holiday at the end of this engagement. If there is a possibility of

an extension — and I assure you there is a very good possibility of that — this idea would be folly.

My feelings in this are that you have already had one long holiday, too long if I recall. And I am afraid that if you mention this to Mr. Koschmider you will again be having a long holiday, repeat *long*.

If there is anything you would like me to do in Liverpool for you, i.e. see parents, etc., I would be only too pleased to settle any personal problems you may have as I feel as your manager, I should do my best on such matters to give you peace of mind.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you all for the non-existent letters of information I have received.

Yours sincerely,
Allan.

From the tone of this letter you can gather the situation. What the holiday plan was all about I don't know to this day. Where did they want to go? To the moon? Crazy boys. But they were just boys.

I can't remember why, such a long time afterwards, I was referring to the Indra.

I was negotiating to get Rory and his boys out. He was a spectacular performer, a great showman and a frenzied rock'n'roll singer.

I made several trips over to Hamburg to keep my eye on the groups. On each trip I could see that the Beatles were a tremendous growing success.

One night at the Kaiserkeller I was drinking at the bar with Derry Wilkie and Howie Casey. We looked around at the audience, which was in a state of shock and suffering from early Beatlemania.

'How about it, Howie? What do you think of the Beatles now, sport?' I couldn't keep the satisfaction out of my voice. Howie had knocked the Beatles so long.

Howie took a swig at his German beer and said, 'Yeah, Allan, I know what you mean. I did knock them. But I never knew how much they had developed. They're the best. No doubt about that. The best ever.'

Coming from Howie, an old hand, that was praise of the

highest order. I felt that my faith (which I must admit had often faltered) was now vindicated. They were an outstanding, exciting group whose powerful sound and eerily dominating personalities reached out and grabbed an audience.

Derry, that honey-gold-skinned singer, said, 'Allan, they're going to be so big . . .' He ran out of words.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Leather pants and wielding a whip

During the next eighteen months at the Kaiserkeller, the Top Ten Club and later the Star Club, the Beatles were to flower like some exotic blooms in a musical hothouse. Something was happening to them in Hamburg which injected into their hearts and music a mysterious vital force that would stay with them forever.

Later such groups as Gerry and the Pacemakers. The Big Three, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, and King Size Taylor and the Dominoes joined the scene. They all worked long arduous hours. On week-days they didn't finish playing till two in the morning, and on Saturday night they played right on till three. No wonder nearly all the groups took to booze and pills while they were in Hamburg. Despite the fact that they were young and healthy, they needed stimulants to keep going on that kind of schedule.

Amphetamines were easy to obtain and the place was flooded with alcohol. Everyone was on booze and pills. The pills would be black bombers, red bombers, green bombers, uppers, downers and even *Spanische Fliege* — Spanish Fly — the so-called aphrodisiac, which you could buy by the ton in any porno shop in the area (don't bother, it doesn't work). Together the booze and the pills made a formidable combination when applied to the already mercurial personalities of the Liverpool groups.

There were wild times in old Hamburg. Everyone was crazy about the boys from Liverpool. A lot of the groups regularly shacked up with prostitutes who treated them like pets, buying them meals and clothes when they were broke — which was often. In some cases they bought the boys expensive instruments.

Like everyone else, the night ladies of Hamburg were

knocked out by the Beatles. Even now, if you walk, as I did recently, down the ill-famed streets of Hamburg where the prostitutes sit half-naked in the windows of the brothels touting trade, you can stop and chat and they'll tell you amazing stories of those 'naughty Beatles'. Fond stories. Always with affection in their voices. Pills and alcohol led to some peculiar scenes, in which many of these prostitutes figured.

The Beatles had a reasonable amount of money coming in and there didn't seem to be any end to the supply. Easy come, easy go. They didn't give a damn about tomorrow. There was always some good-looking shady lady to buy a Beatle a drink and the necessities of life.

For most of the boys, this was their first time so far away from home. They went wild. Who could blame them? They were lauded wherever they went. But it wasn't only the Beatles who were cruelly disillusioned soon after they arrived in Hamburg.

The boys would meet a good-looking girl in a bar between playing times. They'd have a drink, hold hands, whisper sounds of love, later shack up for the night and think, well, maybe, this could be love. Later, while walking in the brothel quarter they would see their girl friend plying her trade from a window, dressed in leather pants and wielding a whip.

Any wonder the Beatles and the rest of the lads acquired a hard edge to their already abrasive personalities in Hamburg? That's life, they agreed. That's life.

It was a toughening process which took place in an unbalanced crazy atmosphere of unlimited pills and booze and the wild acclaim of the people thronging the pubs and clubs in search of fun and the glamour provided by these strange musicians from Merseyside.

Some of the many groups playing in Hamburg — and I'm not saying which developed quite a passion for the beautiful transvestites in the queer clubs. You might think I am misusing the word 'beautiful', but I defy anyone to tell the difference between a man and a woman when the man/woman has gorgeous breasts, legs to match and skin like a peach.

There were some Liverpool boys — again, I'm not revealing which — who dressed up as women to get the maximum amount of thrill from consorting with these transvestites.

These strange men/women achieved their fetching bosoms by injections of silicone or hormone treatments. It was quite easy for them to seduce the unprepared into thinking they were being entertained by a fantastic female. Then at a crucial moment the seduced would find that 'she' was in fact just like him in many ways. Sometimes remarkably so.

Out of sheer curiosity I visited many of these transvestite joints. I always found the men/women there highly entertaining company, even if you weren't interested in slipping them a handful of marks for some bed time. They liked to talk and pass the time in between clients.

I was once approached by a 'girl' who must have been about six feet four in high heels. She was wearing a very expensive evening gown covered in glitter and with a split right up the side to the thigh. The legs were perfect. She looked desirable — if you didn't know she was a man.

He/she said to me, 'I hear you are Allan Williams, the Beatles' manager.'

She spoke perfect English. They learn a lot in bed, those people. I was on my guard at once.

'Yeah, I'm their manager. Good boys they are too.' I wondered what was coming next.

'They're very nice boys,' she said.

The best, I agreed. Wonderful musicians too.

'You out for a good time?' she said, eyeing me up and down.

'Who isn't?' I answered.

'I mean with someone like me.'

'Not really.'

'You don't like me?'

She was beginning to get aggressive, the way some of these people did if they detected that you regarded them as not quite desirable.

'I don't like boys.'

'I'm not a boy.'

'You're not a girl, that's for sure.' She was built like the side of a house, with massive shoulders. All right, if you like that sort of thing.

She got angrier.

'You needn't try to be so fucking smart,' she said, dropping the lady-like bit. Not that she had had much of that from the start.

'Listen, buster, you and your precious Beatles. I know them very well.'

'Maybe you do,' I said. The boys covered a lot of ground in that area. They liked to move around.

'Yes,' she said, 'very, very well.'

'You trying to say you've had them or something?'

'Figure it out for yourself, you little bugger,' she said haughtily. Now she sounded like a Liverpool lady.

'Don't believe it,' I said, sticking up for my boys. I knew they weren't like that. She mentioned two of their names.

'You ask them,' she said.

'Not true, all lies.'

'You calling me a liar?' She stood up and loomed over me. She could have flattened me with one swing of her tit. Bruno chipped in then and quietened her down.

He had a lot of pull in Hamburg 4 area. She knew it and at once dropped the aggressive attitude. I left on my own. Bruno liked those places. I could only take them in small doses.

None of my Beatles were like that. I dismissed the thought from my mind. She was just a naughty transvestite trying to make trouble, I decided.

There were some very vicious types in Hamburg at that time. The gangster element, always present in any clubland, hired gunmen to enforce their kind of law. The police operated on the philosophy that if the killing was confined to the gangsters themselves and 'civilians' were left alone, there wouldn't be too much probing. Questions over a gang killing were brief and casual.

All the doormen and bouncers carried guns in shoulder holsters. I discovered this one night when I was talking to a club owner with whom I had become very friendly.

'How the hell does that little bouncer on the door keep order? He's no bigger than two-pennorth of copper.'

'Don't worry about his size,' said my friend. 'He carries one of these.' He tapped his shoulder.

He called over to the tiny bouncer. 'Show him,' he said, pointing to the bouncer's shoulder. 'It's okay,' he added when the little bouncer looked at me suspiciously.

The little guy put his hand inside his coat and pulled out the biggest pistol I'd ever seen. It looked like a cannon in his minute

fist. His fingers could hardly go round the butt. The gun was a ·45 automatic, American Army issue. The sort of thing designed to remove your head from your shoulders at close range. Or blow a hole in your body as big as a dinner plate. A nice persuader to have around.

'See,' said my friend as his bouncer slipped the artillery piece back into his holster, 'with that sort of thing on him, he's bigger than the next guy.'

'What about the police?' I asked my pal. 'Don't they care about these geezers packing guns all the time? It's highly illegal back where I come from.'

'The police don't attempt to run this neck of the woods. We do. They kind of help when anyone steps out of line. There is a big financial investment in an area like this. A lot of money has been laid on the line. The big guys who provide the backing don't like to have their dough in jeopardy. They know the right people. The right people know the police. Everything is reasonably worked out.'

The St. Pauli-Reeperbahn-Grosse Freiheit area was quite safe, despite or perhaps because of all this heavy influence. If you kept your nose to your business and were just out to have a good time, you got along fine. A guy on his own, out to sip the delights of the place, stood about as much chance of getting mugged or roughed up as he would in London at the time of writing. Come to think of it, the way London is going, he stood a sight better chance of staying in one piece in Hamburg.

So this was the time and place in which the Liverpool groups found themselves. They took too many pills, drank too much booze and worked till dawn playing their kind of music, soon to become the world's kind of music.

The long hours in competition with Derry and the Seniors, Gerry and the Pacemakers, King Size Taylor and the Dominoes, and The Big Three paid off handsomely for the Beatles. They had to be good to stay the pace. The others all had a head start on them. The Beatles drew abreast, slipped into high gear and overtook them all. They became the Boss Group. The other groups bowed the mental knee to their supremacy. The Beatles loved their new-found fame and position at the top of the heap.

The Beatles' antics didn't always endear them to the Germans. Some of them were still very sensitive about the war

years and wore their national pride where their Iron Crosses had been. Though the war had been over fifteen years, there were still a lot of highly bruisable Teutonic egos. Other Germans were only too glad to forget about the '*ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*' business.

Lennon wasn't one to let them forget. It was often his wont to scream '*Sieg heil*' from the stage of the Kaiserkeller and do a little strut around the place. He thought it was a scream to pull the Germans' legs about their bad old days. He wasn't averse to calling the whole lot of the audience 'fucking Nazis', and I suppose in the clamour and babble of voices, breaking glass and general sounds of people getting drunk, not everyone heard him. Or if they did, maybe they couldn't believe their Germanic ears.

You couldn't blame Lennon or the other Beatles for getting out of hand at times. Some of the heavy gangster mobs would come in and send a dozen crates of booze on to the stage for them. If they had decided not to drink it, things could have got nasty. Some of those gangsters wouldn't think twice about shooting up a place. I wanted the boys to stay all in one piece and keep making the money.

Though there wasn't much point in making too much fuss about misdemeanours with Lennon, I often told him about his language onstage. 'Shit', 'fuck' and 'piss' were normal parts of the Beatles' stage language at that time. Very naughty language, but it was a very naughty area.

If I pulled Lennon up about anything he would say with his big round-eyed, innocent-type expression, 'What, who me, Allan?'

'Yeah, who you.'

'Never, not me.'

'Balls, John, balls. Just lay off. Mak show and do your stuff and stop trying to rile people.'

He didn't have any more of a booze problem than the other denizens of the area. But he could get paralytic. I saw him backstage in Hamburg, head down, slavering at the mouth, reaching for another drink, and thought to myself, 'That boy will never get out on that stage'. But by God and all that's holy, he would get out there, grooving and raving, making great music. What a guy. What a great scout.

Every night the Kaiserkeller was the greatest running party you've ever seen. The scenes were amazing. When the Germans go for you, nothing is too good. It's a wonder the Beatles are not alcoholics today because of those Hamburg nights.

To show their approval, members of the audience would stagger forth and grab at the Beatles' ankles, litter the stage with champagne, even throw pills to get the boys into a greater frenzy. Often you would see enthusiastic drunks totter out of the mob toting crates of champagne and beer and slam them noisily on stage.

'Trinken, trinken,' the drunken benefactor would call and unsteadily resume his seat.

The lads took the caps off the bottles with anything handy – the tops of the amplifiers, guitars, knives. I've seen Lennon open a bottle, crown top, with his teeth. It made me wince to watch. I always expected him to spit out a mouthful of teeth and not the crown top. Never did, though.

One night the mob couldn't wait for the music to open up. A drunken German was so overcome with Beatlemania that he charged up to the stage and put his head through the curtains, exhorting the boys to 'mak show'. He chose the wrong night for Lennon, who had been knocking back the beer and was in no mood to be pushed around.

This German guy yelled that he had brought some very important guests just to see the Beatles at work. Couldn't wait all night, you know, you Beatles.

When the boys didn't start to run around shouting '*Jawohl, mein Herr*', he became abusive. This was too much for Lennon, who told the German to take his big fat head out from the curtains. His head was sticking through like one of those heads a fairground you throw softballs at. If you hit it, you get a prize. They usually have a halfwit with a head like a coconut. But this was a more or less respectable German, just out for a night with the boys.

Lennon hit the guy's head all right — with his boot. The German's plump body described an arc back in the direction from which he came.

The Beatles, hardly bothered, opened up with their first number. I think Paul was trying to sing 'It's Now or Never'. This plucky German chap decided to make those words his

theme. He determined to wage all-out war on the Beatles in general and on John Lennon in particular. He charged in with a full frontal attack.

As the German thundered towards the stage, Lennon saw this sweating Kraut face, full of threat and mayhem. Again, Lennon placed a well-aimed boot into his face, and again, the bloke disappeared back into the audience. To round off his advantage, Lennon snatched up a table knife and flung it after the retreating, screaming figure. The winner: John Lennon.

No doubt the German made a search for Bruno Koschmider to make his complaints, for a little later I saw them together, the victim waving his arms and dabbing his face.

Koschmider talked to me about it. I stuck up for Lennon. 'The boys have to protect themselves. This ain't no schoolroom,' I said. Bruno had to agree he ran a tough place.

Bruno, in fact, wasn't always so easy to handle. I have mentioned before that he quickly became very obsessive and possessive about the Beatles. (The whole world was to become obsessive about the Beatles. You couldn't blame Bruno for being among the first.)

These Hamburg night-spot owners were always insistent on having a defence clause written into their contracts with the groups. Such as:

> The artistes shall not, without the written consent of the management, appear in any place of public entertainment within a radius of twenty-five miles of the place of entertainment mentioned herein for thirty weeks prior, during, and thirty weeks after this engagement . . .

All very thoroughly, Teutonically laid out. Nice and cosy and iron-bound.

After their night's work, or even sometimes during their 'powzer' – the pause stipulated in their contract – the Beatles would go to the Top Ten Club round the corner in the Reeperbahn. This was, and is, a great place run by tall, handsome, soft-spoken Peter Eckhorn. He was a real pal to the Beatles. They would go over there not only to see Peter and have a few beers in the dispense bar at the back of the club, but also to watch Tony Sheridan, that great singer-guitarist, at

work. They thought the world of Tony. He was more or less their idol in those days and they admit to learning a lot from his style and technique.

What the Beatles didn't know for a while was that Herr Steiner, the guy from the Heaven and Hell in London who was now working as Bruno's interpreter, was also finking for his boss. He had been instructed to watch out for the Beatles going into any other clubs in the area.

When Fink Steiner ran back to tell Bruno that he had seen his precious Beatles in Peter Eckhorn's Top Ten, Bruno went crazy, resorting to all kinds of quite nasty German words. Bruno didn't like the Beatles hobnobbing with Tony Sheridan because Tony had pulled out of the Kaiserkeller and his fans had moved over with him to the Top Ten.

The lads hated Steiner for this spying and they made it obvious to him that they wished him no good and that perhaps he would be physically chastised for his activities one of these days. But Bruno's dislike of their ventures into other clubs for a few beers didn't put them off. They even sat in with other groups when the mood took them.

Bruno was always getting at the boys about showing their faces around the Reeperbahn. They should stay in the club, he said. They had to come up for air sometimes, replied the Beatles. The Beatles were okay. Bruno knew that if he pushed them too far, they would tell him to fuck off, whatever the consequences.

Another point of aggravation between Bruno and the Liverpool groups which was to come to a head concerned Derry Wilkie. Derry would knock himself out every night doing his great act. The audience loved him and never stopped asking for more. And Derry was always ready to give of himself. To the point of exhaustion. So it was wrong to pick on the boy.

When Derry finished singing a number, and he didn't play an instrument, he would move over to the bar and be right royally entertained by the customers. Derry never had to put his hand down to pay for a beer in the Kaiserkeller. There were always dozens of customers who deemed it an honour to do the paying.

Bruno would go fussing over to Derry, with Steiner in tow to translate his complaints.

'You're supposed to be on stage while the rest of the band is there, Herr Derry.'

'Yeah, man, I'm just having a beer with my friends. I'm going back on again in a minute. I got another song to sing. Don't worry, man.'

'Ach — I do not worry. You have it in your contract when your breaks are, Herr Derry. You must go back on stage.'

Sometimes Derry would go back, sometimes he wouldn't. When he wouldn't Bruno would hop about, chuntering with rage, while Steiner rubbed his hands nervously and ran at his heels. God, what a scene.

Bruno chose to interpret the contract literally. But if Derry wasn't singing at that particular moment, and there was nothing in his contract about playing an instrument, why shouldn't he have a few beers at the bar? Because the contract said he should be on stage, said Bruno. None of this helped the goodwill of the scene. No doubt a generation gap did its insidious work between the groups and Bruno Koschmider. He lived by the law of the contract. They lived life as it came and as they felt it.

Bruno was a guy you could take or leave alone – as, no doubt, you have gathered by now. He could be mean or he could be an A-okay guy. Like most of us. But with Derry and the boys he got mean.

You couldn't make automatons out of Mersey Beat groups. They weren't that kind of clay. They were nobody's yes-men. The time came when Derry Wilkie and the Seniors decided they had had enough of Bruno Koschmider. The feeling was mutual and Derry and the boys cut loose from the Kaiserkeller. They tried to get other club work in the area but their contracts forbade that. So for a while they bummed around, cadging a beer here, a meal there. The ladies of the streets were very sympathetic and did their bit to support the out-of-work musicians. The original tarts with hearts.

The boys put out feelers for work in clubs as far away as Denmark and Sweden, but nothing came of it right then. Derry and the Seniors finally made it back to Liverpool, broke, disillusioned and much, much wiser.

So now Koschmider needed another group to go on the bill with the Beatles.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The little pox doctor of Hamburg. Guess who?

The number one group back in Liverpool round about that time was Rory Storm and the Hurricanes. Rory's drummer was Ringo Starr, he of the beringed hands and sad Mexican-bandit eyes.

Rory and the boys were very keen on getting a job in Hamburg because they had heard stories of the good money and vivid life-style there. Like all the groups, they were avid for new experience and excitement. Life could never get big enough for them. Nor too exotic, nor too vital. Rory and his group were used to living well. Not for them the sleazy digs and third-rate boarding houses – at Butlin's holiday camps, where they were very big, they had chalet accommodation and as many birds as they could lay end to end.

When Rory arrived in Hamburg and Bruno Koschmider told him that he and the rest of the band would have to bed down in dressing-rooms behind the stage at the Kaiserkeller, I thought that perhaps he would direct his musicians to turn tail and go right back home.

'S-s-s-say, Allan, y-y-you didn't tell us anything about this kind of living.'

'Ah, come on, Rory, you knew you weren't coming to the Ritz,' I said.

Rory looked around at the dingy accommodation, and then looked at me. I could have laughed out loud. Even when he was just staring at you in normal circumstances, Rory could make you laugh at that certain expression in his eye.

'C-C-C-Christ, it's awful. Ain't it, boys?'

Ringo burst in: 'Say, Allan, we aren't pigs, you know. What's this all about?' Ringo was always a very fussy guy when it came to his personal arrangements.

'Perhaps it's only for a while, Ringo. Let's just get along as

best as possible and see if something better comes along. Now how about it?' I pleaded.

Okay, they agreed, looking with distaste at their new home. Derry and the Seniors had lived in these backstage accommodations, and they hadn't been too careful about keeping the rooms in a neat and tidy condition. None of the Hamburg groups were what you could call meticulously houseproud.

'Bloody hell, you ought to see what the Beatles have to live in. They don't complain,' I said.

'That's the Beatles. We're used to something better than this, man.'

'The Beatles? So what?' said Ringo.

The Beatles' digs behind the cinema were an absolute shambles, a pigsty. The Beatles couldn't be bothered to pick up clothes or cigarettes from the floor. They left the remains of meals lying about on paper plates. Cracked cups were everywhere, along with empty beer bottles. Not what you might call England, home and beauty.

In fact, at Chez Beatles it was not unknown for a visitor to find heaps of excreta on the floor covered over with newspapers. And if you cared to remove the newspapers, you just might see where someone had stubbed out his ciggie in the obnoxious heap. Things got so bad at Chez Beatles that the cleaners refused to have anything to do with the place.

Sometimes when members of the groups were invited to parties, their *pièce de résistance* was to do their business on the carpet and laughingly point out the offensive stuff to their boggle-eyed host and hostess.

They had upon them a temporary madness induced by the intense adulation, pills and booze. When you live on booze and pills, the abnormal becomes normal and you live out of character. They weren't bad boys — just for a while lunatics, soon to be back to almost normal.

Venereal disease of all kinds was rife in Hamburg. Of the scores of lads there from Liverpool there can have been few who didn't make the acquaintance of the very efficient pox doctors. Hamburg being a big international port, the authorities were well equipped to handle this kind of problem.

One of the very nasty consequences of the incidence of VD

among the groups in Germany was that when they went back to England, the boys spread it around. I don't say they did it on purpose. It just happened naturally. The figures of VD in Britain during that time were spiralling like mad. It is my belief and theory that the disease was on constant export from Hamburg.

The boys in all the bands were careless about their personal hygiene. They weren't criminally negligent, just not too fussy. They were also ignorant about the symptoms of VD. There hadn't been all the very telling propaganda campaigns about VD in those days.

I was older than most of the musicians and many of them came to me with some of their problems. One of their problems was VD. I got to be known as the Little Pox Doctor of Hamburg. I could have done without this title. But there you are. I did my best.

The off-duty pub for a lot of the boys was a small bar in the Grosse Freiheit called the Gretel and Alfons. The bar was tiny and on a slightly higher level was a minute dining area. It was nothing to write home about, but for some reason the Beatles favoured it, and so did many of their friends. I'm not naming any names, but I often officiated as the Little Pox Doctor of Hamburg in the back room there.

One of the boys would approach me, furtively.

'Say, Al, can I have a chat with you on your own for a moment?'

'Sure, what's up?'

'Well, er, er, let's go out the back.'

We would walk out the back, leaving the rest of the boys drinking their beer and looking at their watches, making sure they wouldn't be late on stage.

The anxious-faced group member would say, 'Look, Al, don't tell anyone this, will you?'

I would know what was coming. I'd be seeing nob ends in my sleep. And they don't turn me on. I'm strictly hetero.

'No, no. What's the trouble?'

The group member would start fiddling with his fly.

'I went with this girl the other night. I didn't know she was on the game. And I think there's something wrong with my nob end.'

'Let's have a look at it then.'

The zip would come open, the offending appendage would appear and the Little Pox Doctor of Hamburg would bend down to take a looksee.

I looked for swellings in the groin, a discharge from the end, and asked about pain on urinating, all the things I'd read about. Sadly, I often found these symptoms to be very, very apparent.

Sometimes I'd get a musician to pee in a beer glass and I'd examine the urine up against the poor light in the back bar of the Gretel and Alfons. You could make lots of mistakes that way. Especially if the glass wasn't washed out properly.

I did my best as the Little Pox Doctor of Hamburg. Always I told them to go to a quack or the nearest hospital if there was any doubt. I arranged for many of the boys to get private treatment because they were too shy or embarrassed to go to the big hospitals which catered for such cases. They didn't always take my advice. No one ever does.

Many of them were only temporarily or partly cured. They were told to lay off alcohol and other drugs and give the VD injections a chance to work properly. But they were so irresponsible and bound up in their way of life that it was difficult for them to refrain from drugs and alcohol. When all around you are drinking and popping pills like there is no tomorrow, it is not conducive to iron self-discipline.

Also the boys often would not go for the full course of treatment. When they got back to England they found they still had a leaky cocky, but hey-ho, who cared? So some unfortunate little scrubber from the backwoods would go home after a night out with her favourite group carrying the disease, unknown to her. Very, very sad indeed.

A lot of things happened in those mad bad glad days in Hamburg. Anyone who could walk the straight and narrow on that scene was a fucking saint, and I don't believe there are many of those around any more. If there ever were.

Walking down the street you'd hear a voice in your ear, loud and insistent:

'Hey, mister, you wanna bit of the sporting life? Two men fucking a woman. All the sporting life.'

'Right this way, sir. Two women fucking. You wanna look? Come on now, don't cost anything to look.'

'Here, mister, you like young boys? You look at these beautiful boys.'

'You want some pills, boy?'

'You wanna get whipped?'

'You wanna get fucked?'

You wanna get hung, drawn and quartered? You could get anything that was kinky.

The saving grace of the Reeperbahn is its humanity. In this it is the opposite of Soho in London. At dives in the Reeperbahn they might fleece you just as efficiently as in Soho. But they would do it with a certain amount of friendliness and interest in your well-being.

As I have said before, there was a dark side to the Beatles' sense of humour. They were basically iconoclastic in their outlook, while at the same time giving off this homespun aura of the boys next door.

I have no particularly strong religious beliefs. In a tight spot I might say under my breath 'Jesus Christ, get me out of this one'. But the world's too damn awful a place for me to put my faith in some Big Man up in the sky. Still I was shocked when the Beatles erected their own effigy of that other superstar, Jesus Christ himself.

The Beatles had been having an early morning drink at a flat belonging to the owner of the Star Club, Manfred Weissleder. For a bit of a lark they decided to make their very own contribution to the Sunday morning religious devotions of the city. So they procured some materials, hardboard and paper, and using to the full their artistic skills, quickly fashioned an eight-foot figure of Our Lord on the cross. They hoisted this figure up over the roof of their flat and there it towered while the bells of the Hamburg churches united to send their gentle sounds floating over the wakening city.

As the good, stolid people of Hamburg walked through the quiet streets they saw against the Hamburg skyline this figure of Christ. It was no Second Coming, as the Hamburgers found out when they took a closer look at the effigy. What might have been accepted as an impulsive gesture of faith by the Beatles did not look quite right. Someone had pinned to the effigy, in the appropriate place, a huge French letter filled with beer dregs.

It was a shocking thing to do, I suppose. Even if you had little or no faith, it was a bit offensive. Pilled out of their minds the Beatles were, or they wouldn't have done it. Not those home-spun boys.

There were complaints galore about this outrage but Manfred had the ear of the police officials, so there were no real repercussions other than a stern warning to the Beatles that their sense of humour had misfired.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The wrecking squad and Willy's place

There were many rich incidents when Rory Storm and the Hurricanes were appearing on the same bill as the Beatles at the Kaiserkeller. Rory took great delight in teasing Bruno Koschmider. Bruno didn't know how to handle Rory and his spectacular stutter.

The stage at the Kaiserkeller, through much use and the vigorous stomping of the Beatles and the weight of so many crates of booze, had begun to feel alarmingly unstable. The boys didn't like it. They told Bruno that there could be a nasty accident with one or both of the groups disappearing through a hole in the floor of the stage.

The Beatles would needle him as much as they could in an attempt to get Bruno to make the stage safe or replace it altogether.

'Come on, Herr Koschmider, what about it? You want us to exit in a cloud of dust?'

'Christ — who'll pay the bill for a broken leg?'

Then in rapid Scouse talk so that Bruno couldn't catch the drift, they'd say to him, 'Yer a right mingy' (mean) 'old Scouse get, aren't yer?'

No matter what the Beatles said, Bruno wouldn't see their point about the rapidly deteriorating stage. He wasn't keen on shelling out enough marks to get a new and safer stage for the boys.

Rory tried too.

'J-J-J-J-Jesus, Mister Koschmider, if one of my legs goes through those boards I'll f-f-f-fucking sue you for every p-p-p-penny you've f-f-f-fucking got. Or f-f-fucking pf-pf-pfennig, for that m-m-m-matter.'

Bruno would look in a bemused way at the stuttering blond boy. He never could understand him. Rory would stare right

back, that quizzical, not unfriendly, look on his thin, not altogether lovely features. Poor Rory, he was to die in tragic circumstances. Broken-hearted.

'It's okay, boys, you go right ahead and do your stuff. Let me worry about the stage,' said Bruno.

Now Rory was a very athletic bloke. He was a champion swimmer and runner. He often made spectacular leaps from the stage and he was even known to swing from ballroom chandeliers back on Merseyside. He would do something like that just for a dare, a bet, for fun or publicity. He once jumped off New Brighton Pier during his act. Luckily, he landed in deep cushioning mud.

Bruno, of course, didn't know he had an athlete on his hands. But he soon found out.

Willy's Café in the Grosse Freiheit was one of the places frequented by the groups. Their favourite dish on the menu, believe it or not, was milk and cornflakes. (When you are on a constant diet of booze and pep pills I suppose this is the easiest food to get through to your long-suffering stomach.) They chased the cornflakes and milk down with bottles of powerful German beer. The Beatles were responsible for starting this cornflakes, milk and beer kick. They loved it. The other groups all fell into line. What was good enough for the Beatles was good enough for them. Trendsetters even in those days.

Rory and the Hurricanes and the Beatles held a council of war in Willy's Café over their cornflakes, beer and pep pills.

'We'll show the fucker.'

'What'll we do?'

'What can we do to get the bastard to build a new stage?'

'Let's set fire to the fucking thing.'

'Come off it, we might burn the whole show down.'

'Well, it's only money.'

'Nah, you gotta be reasonable.'

'He's not being reasonable.'

'He's being a cunt.'

'Yeah, mean as hell.'

'Tight as a duck's . . .'

'I know.'

'What?'

'Well it's going to fall down one of these days, isn't it?'

'Yeah, with us on the fucker.'

'That's the trouble.'

'Some poor bastard will get hurt.'

'Okay, so we just speed the process up a bit.'

'How d'you mean, wack?'

'Jump about a bit more.'

'Sure. Let's wreck it.'

'Great. Then old Bruno will *have* to build a new one.'

'Marvellous!'

Chorus: 'Let's do it.'

So that's how they set out to wreck Bruno's stage. They did it in no time at all.

That night the boys went on to 'mak show' with such a will that Bruno Koschmider couldn't believe his eyes. Sometimes, late in the morning after the groups had been on stage for long hours, they got a bit lethargic. Then Bruno would urge them to 'mak show'. But he didn't have to now. They bounded and leaped, jumped and pounded, till the stage shuddered and creaked and the upright piano teetered and jangled.

Bruno found he was stuck with a couple of gangs of Whirling Devishes. But he couldn't very well ask the boys not to 'mak show',

He said to the Beatles rather worriedly, 'Boys, boys, you are very energetic tonight, *ja*?'

'Ja.'

'We mak show.'

'That's what you want, isn't it? Mak show?'

Bruno: 'Sure, mak show. But . . .'

'Well then, what're you worried about?'

'Yeah, we're flogging ourselves to a standstill trying to mak show.'

'Christ, there's no pleasing some people.'

Night after night the boys increased the pace of 'mak show'. They laid bets as to which group would have the honour of finally reducing the stage to a pile of splintered wood. The two groups decided on one collective wager. The group on stage when it disintegrated would be the winners. The other group would buy a crate of German champagne. The losing group would also have to give the winners a piggy-back ride round the Reeperbahn. After the champagne had been drunk.

The chase was on. It was obviously merely a matter of time before the stage in its advanced state of disrepair would finally give up the ghost. Then the boys would have won the day.

One night the Beatles were having a 'powzer' in Willy's Café, munching their way through bowls of cornflakes and milk and gulping their beer.

'That fucking stage can't take much more of it.'

'Christ, I hope we don't lose.'

'A crate of champagne . . .'

'How many fucking marks is that?'

'Too fucking many.'

'He's an athletic guy, that Rory.'

'Boy, can he jump.'

'I wish I could get a bet on Rory.'

'Don't be a fucking traitor.'

Rory was due off at any minute. The Beatles were getting ready to leave the café and go on stage for their stint.

'Ah well, he hasn't done it yet. We hope.'

'We could be having the champagne yet.'

Just as the Beatles were walking out the door of Willy's Café Rory and the Hurricanes came running across the road from the Kaiserkeller, whooping and hollering like a pack of hounds.

'We've done it,' yelled the Hurricanes, skidding to a halt in the doorway of Willy's place.

Rory echoed the claim in his very own way.

'W-w-w-we've f-f-f-fucking done it, b-b-b-boys. The ch-ch-ch-ampagne's f-f-f-fucking ours.'

The Beatles were happy that the stage had finally been demolished, even though they had lost the bet. They all crowded back into Willy's and started ordering champagne. Rory told them of the glorious moment when the stage had at last collapsed.

The regulars in the audience were in on the bet between the two groups. There was no action Bruno could take because the boys were only following his instructions to 'mak show'. He had to watch in agony, wringing his hands and cursing under his breath in German while Rory had felt the boards going under his gyrating feet. He was in his element.

'It's going, boys,' he had shouted to the rest of the band. 'She's f-f-f-fucking well going tonight.'

The audience had yelled encouragement. 'Mak show, Rory, mak show, Hurricanes.' They had howled with glee to see the rickety stage heaving like a storm-lashed sea under Rory's big pounding feet. The whole thing appealed to the Germanic taste for wanton destruction, I imagine.

Rory shouted again to the Hurricanes and they broke into 'Blue Suede Shoes'. It was that number that did it. In one final leap Rory came crashing down on the matchwood stage in his scuffed high-heeled boots. That was it. The Hurricanes, every man jack of them, led by Rory, disappeared in a climax of splintering wood and twanging instruments.

The group regained their feet to the sustained cheers of the crowd. Bruno blew his top and Rory and the Hurricanes extricated themselves from the tangle. They made for Willy's Café to claim their bet and break the good news.

So there they were, drinking champagne and preening themselves on having beaten that old meanie Bruno Koschmider. Now Bruno had never been able to pin down the fact that the Beatles and the Hurricanes were deliberately bent on destroying his stage. He knew all right. But he hadn't been able to prove it.

Unseen by the two bands, Herr Steiner was standing in a crowd at the end of the bar when Rory came in boasting about winning the bet. Steiner ran back with the news. And Bruno had proof of the deliberate vandalism. Trouble.

Trouble did I say? Like wow . . .

On hearing the shocking story of the groups' evil plot from his faithful fink Herr Steiner, Bruno ground his Teutonic teeth in chagrin. This he would not have from those English boys. Enough was, he shouted, enough. He at once despatched half of his staff of bouncers and waiters to charge over the road and teach those naughty boys a lesson they wouldn't forget in a hurry. The waiters and bouncers were armed to the teeth with chair legs and their own personal weapons, like small hefty blackjacks you could buy in any respectable armaments shop on the Reeperbahn.

The Beatles and Rory Storm and the Hurricanes were halfway through the case of champagne, telling each other what great guys they were and how they had pulled the best of strokes over Bruno Koschmider, the big bad wolf of the Grosse

Freiheit. Then in through the door of Willy's Café steamed the wrecking squad despatched by their boss Bruno.

The groups took one quick look at the invaders and decided that they had to take defensive action. Battle was joined.

The bouncers and waiters, really tough nuts, waded into the Beatles and the Hurricanes. It should be easy meat for them, they thought. They had reckoned without the natural toughness and gameness of the lads from Merseyside. They were no bar-room gladiators. They didn't go out looking for trouble, but they could handle themselves when the need arose. It had arisen.

'Okay, boys, get stuck in.'

'Up the 'Pool.'

'Beat 'em off with the chairs, boys.'

'Watch out for that big fat bastard with the chair leg.'

The battle was short and sharp. The boys from Liverpool were the victors. They ripped the legs off the tables and chairs of poor Willy's place and beat the living daylights out of the Koschmider battalion. The scene was like something from a John Wayne movie. At the end of it, the German forces slunk back to the Kaiserkeller. The boys had won the day. There would be a new stage.

Willy's place got back almost to normal. The lads had a whip round to pay for the damage and there were no repercussions about beating the place up. Here you are, Willy. This should take care of the damage. End of scene.

That was the thing about the Reeperbahn area. If you did some damage but footed the bill, everything was forgotten. No police, no trouble, no sweat. The boys liked Willy's Café. They ate their cornflakes and milk there.

CHAPTER TWENTY

And this little piggy got stoned

When The Big Three played Hamburg, they brought with them Adrian Barber, a tall, lanky, good-looking boy, a tremendously able sound technician. He helped to invent the big-box amplifiers that allowed Beat music to blast out to full effect. Before he came on the scene, the amplifiers were tiny affairs with very little power.

He was a very brilliant boy and a great guitar player. He also liked pill popping. He was King Pill in those days. He took them by the handful and came back for more.

The groups loved walking round the Flea Market in Hamburg on Sunday mornings, taking in a few beers, buying all sorts of junk and generally having a relaxing time. One Sunday, Adrian, feeling like he was on another planet, because of all the pills, bought a young pig off one of the stalls.

I don't like cruelty to animals, and in retrospect the incident I am about to describe doesn't seem funny. Everyone thought it was a hoot at the time (of course, everyone was either boozed or pilled out of their tiny minds). This is the way it happened.

Having bought this piglet, which he mumbled he wanted as a friend to maybe take back to Liverpool when it got older, Adrian went into a pet shop. There he purchased a big collar with spikes – the sort of thing you buy for a great fierce dog. This was ceremoniously clipped round the tiny piggy's neck, much to the amusement of the lads from all the groups congregated in the street, including the Beatles.

'Watch it doesn't eat somebody, Adrian.'

'It'll pull you off your feet if you don't watch out.'

'This little piggy didn't get to market.'

'This little piggy got stoned.'

'You're a mad bastard, Adrian.'

'Ham all the way through . . .'

Adrian trotted the poor beast all over the Reeperbahn. The traffic stopped flowing, the Hamburgers doubled up with laughter. The police stared and couldn't believe it. Ah well, simply another of those crazy musicians.

In an attempt to get the piggy to bark like a dog – who knows, in his pilled state perhaps Adrian believed it *was* a dog – Adrian whined at it and pranced about going 'Woof, woof – for Christ's sake, woof, woof, you idiot animal'.

The piggy squealed dismally.

Adrian was sharing a room with a singer called Buddy. They didn't get on very well because Buddy was a bit effeminate and Adrian suspected he was either queer or turning that way. He didn't want to be in digs with a queer, said Adrian. In those days people weren't as grown-up about queers as they are now. Adrian prided himself on his *machismo* and didn't want anyone to get the wrong impression of him because he shared a pad with this guy who had a kind of a funny way with him. As far as I know, Buddy was quite ordinary hetero. But, one thing or another, Adrian did not like Buddy.

There came to Adrian's crazed mind in a brilliant flash of inspiration that here was a marvellous chance to get rid of Buddy. Adrian and the pig-dog would do it together. They would get the blighter to leave with no trouble at all.

Adrian sneaked up the stairs to the room. He knew that Buddy was still in bed having a long Sunday morning lie-in. He crashed through the door, pig-dog held on high, and with a mad light in his pilled eyes yanked the blankets off the thoroughly frightened Buddy.

There was Buddy, naked, cowering up against the wall, hoping it would open up and hide him away from this madman who had suddenly appeared with a pig on a lead.

Adrian held the pig on high and screamed. 'This little piggy went boogie-woogie piggy all the way home.'

Then he hurled the poor animal, dog lead and all, at the panic-stricken Buddy, the alleged homo.

The Beatles and the rest of the boys had followed Adrian upstairs to watch the fun. They saw some fun, all right. The poor pig was so scared out of its wits that its bowels involuntarily opened. The piggy did the dirt on Buddy, who

shrieked for them all to get out and take their pig with them or he would call the fucking police. The lads all killed themselves laughing.

Adrian, highly pleased with himself, picked up the whimpering piggy and ran off down the stairs, followed by the whooping, giggling crowd of musicians.

The owner of the Star Club, Manfred Weissleder, happened to be out walking when Adrian and the pig re-emerged on to the street scene. A huge crowd began to gather round Adrian and the rest of the musicians.

The Germans have a high regard for animals (pity they don't have the same regard for some people) and feeling began to run high against this wild English youth who was plainly ill-treating a dumb piggy with a dog collar on. A dog collar which would have fitted a St. Bernard, no less. It looked like a horse collar on the cowed little piggy. The brute. This Englishman was a *Schwein*. The scene was getting ugly.

Manfred walked forward through the crowd.

'It's all right,' he said to the Germans. 'I'll sort this lot out.'

He led Adrian to a nearby butcher where the animal was put out of its misery.

Adrian was heartbroken. The police cautioned him but took no further action.

Adrian would not be entirely thwarted. He got himself a large-size shaving brush used for a shop display, put the dog lead round the shaving brush and studded the brush with nails and razor blades. Then he dragged this weird contraption around the streets. He sat at a café table drinking beer and popping pills and telling anyone who would listen, 'Look, this piggy's having piglets.'

As I said, Sunday at the Flea Market could be quite spectacular fun.

Another Sunday morning the Beatles were again at Manfred Weissleder's flat, having a few drinks and taking it easy. A whole flock of nuns were passing down the street below Manfred's pad when the Beatles spotted them. Oh dear God, that was it.

'Come on, boys, let the girls see what we're made of.'

'Do what?'

'Get your cock out. Let's baptise 'em.'

'You don't mean it.'

'I do.'

'Piss on a nun?'

'Piss on a nun, a flock of nuns.'

'Quick, they'll get away in a minute.'

So the Beatles produced their members and gently peed on the nuns walking along the street in their starched immaculate habits.

The good ladies on their way to prayer didn't even look up. Perhaps they knew what they would find pee-ering down on them, to coin a phrase. Or maybe they thought it was just a quick passing shower.

The Beatles should have landed in jail, by rights. They led a charmed life, those boys, a charmed life. But haven't they always? God's Own.

On one occasion towards the end of the year, the British Seamen's Mission in Hamburg threw a dinner for the British contingent in the city. Lennon and the other Beatles were invited. Ever eager to stuff himself with food — remember, he had the reputation of being a bit of a glutton — Lennon arrived early but not bright. He had had a few beers on the way to the waterfront mission hall.

Many civic dignitaries from the Hamburg City Council were present, making it rather a stuffed-shirt occasion. The Beatles looked a bit out of place, to put it mildly.

They took their seats beside the big-wigs, grace was said in sepulchral tones and Lennon wolfed into his food shouting, 'Thank Christ for all this food.' Only the way he said it, the words didn't come out as a form of additional grace.

Then to compound the situation and really make the snooty eyeballs stand out on stalks, he screamed to no one in particular, 'Get the bloody ale up.'

He was drinking heavily at that time in Hamburg, perhaps no more than the others, but he showed it. Miraculously, when he went on stage, some inner strength seemed to take over and he would always give a superb performance.

I think the booze on its own would have been okay. But always there were pills, pills, pills.

The club staff could always get a supply. Everyone worked

long hours. So everyone took pills. The owners encouraged it. The more pills a group took — up to a point — the longer they could play without demanding a break. Pill-taking resulted in some rather macabre behaviour, but the owners figured it was worth it if the tills kept taking the money. One way of looking at life. The tough way. Not mine.

The Beatles once clowned a scene for the camera, showing them squatting on their haunches like dogs, in a mock begging attitude. They had an entreating look in their eyes as they held their hands up to the pill pusher they were dealing with at the time.

There was always some abrasiveness with Bruno Koschmider, what with one thing or another. You had to keep a tight rein on him. Or try to.

Here is a typical letter I wrote to him on 11th November, 1960, about my commission. The 'Willy' mentioned was a Koschmider employee.

Dear Mr. Koschmider,

My bank in Hamburg informs me that no commission has been paid since I was last in Hamburg.

I realise that with Willy leaving you, it must have given you a lot of extra work to manage your club.

As you can appreciate, to keep my books in order I must have my commission up to date.

In our contract it clearly states that £10 sterling is to be paid into the Commerz Bank, Hamburg, every week. No commission has been paid for Rory Storm and there is one week outstanding for the Beatles on their old contract, also the commission on the renewal contract.

I do not want you to think that I am worried about it as I understand you must have had a very busy time lately, but please, I must have my books in order.

Also I think the agent's contract that Willy and I signed has not been any good to me whatsoever — again I think this is because you have not time to bother with it, so I hereby cancel the contract as from today.

I would appreciate it if you would write also cancelling it, the agent's contract.

I hope the club is still doing good business for you and that you, yourself, are in good health. My regards to Herr Steiner.

Yours faithfully,
A. R. Williams

The agent's contract mentioned in the letter had to do with my becoming Koschmider's agent in England. It never came off.

The following letter gives you the measure of my dealings with Bruno. It refers to Bruno's attempt to reduce my commission. In it I am also answering his criticisms about the groups moving off the stage between numbers (always a big point of complaint with the meticulous Bruno).

Dear Mr. Koschmider,

Please find enclosed the contracts for Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, altered as agreed on the telephone, which I must ask you to initial.

I am a little hurt and disappointed in your recent actions regarding this contract as I have been very co-operative with all your requests and have provided you with good bands at a very reasonable fee, and that you should try to reduce my commission leaves me in doubt as to your good faith and I hope that there are no such further disagreements to injure our previous good relationship.

I have very carefully instructed them [this referred to Rory and the Hurricanes and the Beatles] on the conditions under which they are to perform, and have pointed out that the band must not wander from the stage; this they have agreed to, but for some of the musical items it requires certain of the artistes to appear in theatrical movements, as they appear on stage to set movements. [I can't figure out what the hell I was trying to say there.] This is very difficult to explain but as an artiste yourself you will appreciate the value of good entrance and presentation.

It is imperative that I know by return of post whether you intend to re-engage Derry and the Seniors, as you will appreciate that I have to make other arrangements for them.

I would like to suggest, for publicity purposes, that you bill

Rory Storm and the Hurricanes from fabulous season at Butlin's holiday camp in England.

It is not possible to get the steel band or Jazz Band for less than £150 sterling per week.

I would also like to ask are you prepared to increase your offer for Cliff Richard, as we now know the offer of £250 from Germany is a definite one.

I have opened negotiations for Tommy Steele and suggest you let me know what fee you are prepared to pay, and if it is again for a ten day tour.

Yours faithfully,
Allan

Cliff Richard on the Reeperbahn. Can you imagine that uptight little feller among the pills, the booze, the broads? Yeeeoow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Beatles – What's that German band?

One evening I had met the Beatles for a drink during their breather between numbers at the Kaiserkeller — the 'powzer'. We were in a club on the Grosse Freiheit, sitting with a couple of the local gangsters and their girl friends.

A Latin American group was on stage, all dolled up in white dinner jackets and greasy hair. To the hammer of bongo drums and maracas. the band broke into the then-current Elvis Presley number, 'It's Now or Never'.

This happened to be Paul McCartney's favourite tune at that time. He was humming along with the Latin American beat when I saw this guy walk up to our table. I thought there was something suspicious-looking about him. He had one hand stuck in his jacket pocket like a hood in a Jimmy Cagney film. Sure enough, he was a hood.

He stopped at our table, pulled his hand from his pocket. He was holding a gun and pointing it straight at one of our German friends.

I shouted, 'Watch it, boys!' thinking at first of the Beatles' safety.

Everyone ducked under the table. There was a flash and a terrific bang. This guy with the gun ran out. When I sat up again, our German pal was slumped on the table with his face a mass of blood.

I don't know what it was all about. Most likely a gang war over territory or protection. Two more blokes appeared and the injured man with blood spouting from his face wounds was rushed out.

That's the sort of place the St. Pauli-Reeperbahn area was. A guy could have his head blown off having a few quiet beers.

'Okay, folks, nothing to worry about,' shouted a bouncer.

The Beatles weren't sure.

'Bloody hell, it's Chicago all over again.'
'It could have been us.'
'I'm too young to die, mother.'
'I can't believe it happened.'
'We're due on stage in a couple of minutes.'
'I'm shaking like a leaf.'

Despite their attempts to treat the incident with jocularity the Beatles were badly shaken. I was trembling like a leaf. There was blood on the table among the beer glasses.

The lads went on and played their music. Is it any wonder they were tough enough to survive Beatlemania?

During their stint at the Kaiserkeller, the Beatles made their very first record. I was their recording manager, producer and agent all rolled into one small package.

Rory Storm, who was the lead singer of his Hurricanes, had another boy in the band who had a very pleasant voice. This guy's name was Wally. He had a fantastic vocal range and the Beatles were fascinated by him. As a trained singer myself, I recognised Wally as having interesting potential. Perhaps with the Beatles' backing we would have a new sound.

By this time the Beatles — except drummer Pete Best — had got to know Ringo Starr very well indeed. They were drinking pals and the Beatles often talked about Ringo.

'He's bloody terrific.'
'We could have done with him back in Liverpool.'
'He's got style.'
'He's got drive, Allan.'

Mean and moody Pete Best didn't like this talk at all. And of course, the day would come when Pete's place would be taken by Ringo.

Wally's favourite songs were 'Fever' and 'Summertime'.

'Say, Al, how about making a record?'
'A record? What sort of a record?'
'You know — one with a hole in it.'
'Yeah, yeah — what record?'
'With Wally, Rory's singer.'
'Why Wally?'
'He's bloody good.'
'Who's going to pay for it?' said I.

'You are.'

'Oh.'

So that's how we decided to make the Beatles' very first record. History, here we come.

They decided that the news had to be broken to Pete Best that Ringo Starr would be their drummer on the record. They told him that Ringo was essential because he knew Wally's numbers. Pete didn't like it, but up with it he had to put, as they say.

We piled all the gear, drums, guitars, mikes, bottles of beer and some sandwiches into my car, which I had driven over on my latest trip. We went along to a Hamburg studio I had heard about, called the Akustik Studio, where people could make greetings records to send to relatives and friends. You know the sort of thing. 'Hello, Mum, this is me speaking. We are all right and looking forward to seeing you at Christmas. How are you? Baby sends his love. Say something to Mum . . . goo goo goo . . . well, that's all for now, Mum, give our love to Joe, John, Sarah, Sammy, Alfie, Dotty, Lulu, blah blah . . .'

The studio was behind Hamburg Central Station. It was on a very small scale indeed. I don't know, maybe it's a big business now.

The Beatles didn't mean anything to the people there. They were just another amateur group who wanted to make a disc. Maybe looking for a job, or sending a song to their folks back in England.

'You want to send a message.'

'Nah, we don't want to send a message.'

'If I want to send a message I'll write a letter.'

'Say, Al, tell him we're musicians.'

'What for? He's not interested.'

'Not a very big place for a recording studio, is it?'

'How would you know? You've never been in one.'

'Hey — what's all that funny-looking gear over there?'

'That's his machine for making coffee, you mug.'

'Funny, funny.'

'Okay, boys, let's get started.'

Wally was a thin little guy with mousy hair, very quiet-spoken. His voice range was phenomenal. He could go from a falsetto to a deep bass. This is what had intrigued the Beatles. Hence their first record session.

There was no room in the small studio to have a separate area for the drummer, as would be normal. The boys, with Wally in the middle, were grouped round the mikes and the session started.

Wally got so nervous that he forgot the words of 'Summertime'.

'Come on, Wally, what the fuck.'

'You must have sung this a million times.'

'Now you fuck it up.'

'Give me a chance, boys . . . I'm nervous.'

'Bloody hell, Wally . . .'

'Give him a pill, somebody.'

Williams: 'Now, now, fellers, he'll be all right. Give him a chance. Come on, Wally, think, think, you know the words.'

Ringo sat there twiddling his sticks, so many rings on his fingers he couldn't pick his nose. His first record with the Beatles. For the first time all four of the Beatles who were to rock the world were together in one record studio – a recording studio as big as my Aunt Fanny's kitchen back home in the Dingle. But a recording studio.

All I did was look at my watch and worry about the boys getting on stage in time at the Kaiserkeller. Didn't want any trouble with Bruno Koschmider. There was always trouble with Bruno Koschmider, it seemed. That generation gap lifting its ugly old head.

Wally picked up on the words and the Beatles sailed in behind him.

Then they did 'Fever' with very few hitches. The recording engineer played it back.

It was fine, it was great. All except for Ringo on the drums. Because he had not been in a separate cubicle, his drums came over sounding like two coconuts being clapped together — or like the sort of gadget they use in radio plays to simulate horses' hoof-beats. We had a good laugh at that, but Ringo wasn't too pleased.

'Bloody hell, Al,' he said. 'Is that really me?'

The Beatles pulled his leg.

'Yeah, that's you, Ringo.'

'Giddyup, giddyup, old Black Bess, only a few more miles I guess.'

'Sounds like Custer's last charge.'

'Ah, balls . . .'

Wally sounded very exciting indeed. He came over beautifully. We had ourselves a record. The engineer apologised for having to make it at speed 78. He used a disc, the other side of which was a sales spiel by some guy selling leather goods like handbags and shoes. How about that for the B side of the first Beatle disc? I paid for the record, giddyup drums and all. Ten quid.

The Beatles were very impressed with the sound they made on the record. Now they wanted to make one of their own, just the Beatles.

But again I looked at my watch. 'Some other time, boys, you're due on stage at any minute.'

'Forget Koschmider.'

'Let's do a record of our own.'

'We'll pay for it ourselves.'

'It's only ten measly quid.'

Williams: 'I'm not worried about the money. It's the time. You know what Bruno's like.'

They said some awful things about poor old Bruno Koschmider. His German ears should have been burning.

'We gotta get back to the Reeperbahn, you guys. Come on, give us the records, we're going.'

'Ah, for Christ's sake, Allan.'

'Yeah, come on, Al. Be a sport.'

'Look at the fucking time. Now come on, boys.'

'You'll be sorry, Al.'

'No I won't. You'll be sorry if Bruno Bear Koschmider gets his hooks into you.'

So we didn't make another record with only the Beatles and no Wally in the Akustik Studio behind Hamburg Central Station. I turned a deaf ear to the Beatles' pleas and shepherded them along with their instruments back into the car, loaded up and zoomed back to the Grosse Freiheit in time for the boys to get back on that stage and keep Koschmider sweet. What an idiot I must have been not to listen to their entreaties.

I took the demo disc to the Grade Organisation in London. They were very nice and polite and listened carefully. They even seemed to get a little excited about the sound, but I think

they were a bit disturbed by Ringo's drum beat, all those giddyup sounds.

One of the Grade men said, 'Who did you say these people were? The what?'

'The Beatles. They're in Hamburg.'

'Hamburg, eh? What are they, some sort of German band?'

'Nah, they're English — well, Liverpool,' I corrected. 'They're over there making a couple of bob or two playing in a club.'

'In a club, eh?'

'Yeah.'

The Grade people did nothing with the record.

There were, if I remember rightly, four demo discs made by the Akustic engineers. They should have great collector's value by now if you can find one. I had one. So did Ringo. Wally and Rory Storm got one each. I lost mine and I know Ringo did the same. As usual, I mislaid mine at a party, pissed again.

It happened in London, some years later. I was going to give Ringo a listen. He wanted to have a copy made. On the way to meet Ringo I fell in with some show-biz friends who said they were going to a party with singers Jack Jones and Tony Bennett. Always game for a drink and a laugh, I joined them at this swell do and proceeded to get stoned.

I kept saying to myself, 'Take it easy, don't get pissed, don't lose that record. Ringo needs it.'

Well, of course, Ringo didn't get it. The booze was flowing, I was getting my share and feeling no pain. I hugged the record to my breast with one hand and held the drink to my mouth with the other. I should have done it the other way round. Gone, gone, gone.

Just before the end of their contract with Bruno Koschmider, a few days before Christmas, Bruno whipped himself into a frenzy over the Beatles spending so much time in other clubs.

I told him, 'Listen, Bruno, you can't expect the boys to spend every goddam minute in your place. They do their stuff, they're playing better than ever. What more do you want?'

He wouldn't listen. I knew he was upsetting the Beatles and

they didn't figure on working for him again. I think he had cottoned on to this himself and it only went to aggravate the matter.

One night the Beatles went round the corner to the Top Ten in the Reeperbahn to see their idol, Tony Sheridan. Not only did they go round the corner to see Tony, they — gasp, horror, shock, oh dear — sat in and played with him.

Oh, foolish boys. Because right there in the audience sat the King Fink himself, Herr Steiner, late of the Heaven and Hell in Old Compton Street, Soho, over the road from the Two I's. Eyes gleaming, King Fink hurtled back to his lord and master and gabbled the awful news. Bruno blew his top again. (He had no top left, if you ask me.)

Of course the Beatles had broken their contracts by playing with Tony but, they reasoned, what the hell — they were coming to the end of the agreement anyway.

'He's always leaning on us, Al.'

'He won't leave us alone.'

'He won't let us out of his sight.'

'He loves us.'

'He's funny that way.'

But he had it in the contracts, in black and white and smudged with beer, that they could not play within a radius of twenty-five miles from the Kaiserkeller, and thirty weeks before and thirty weeks after playing for him. So there.

He was livid. The boys grinned.

'Sorry, boss.'

'Won't do it again.'

'Promise.'

'It was just this once.'

'Let us off, mister.'

That sort of thing.

Then there was the incident behind the silver screen in the Beatles' dressing-room digs, where the Beatles had painted 'The Beatles' on the ceiling with smoke from a candle.

While they were packing their few crumpled belongings, one of them waved a French letter about. This was standard equipment in a Beatle's luggage, lusty boys that they were. They blew it up to the size of a football and then set fire to it. The sort of things boys from here to Singapore will do. The trouble was,

the walls were so dusty that there was a whoosh and a flare-up, instant ignition.

Koschmider found out about it and made all sorts of nasty remarks. Others said that out of spite, the Beatles had tried to burn their old home down, that they wanted to leave Bruno laughing, *et cetera* . . .

Now, Bruno was a good bloke in many ways and he put up with a lot from the Beatles. But they could get to him. I think maybe he was a repressed homosexual who had a fixation about the Beatles, as Brian Epstein was to have in a short time to come.

Vindictive and catty, he spilt a bibful to the cops, a right stoolie.

They took poor George and Paul away to the jailhouse. It was pure farce. An incident blown up out of all proportion. There were no charges, but the incident would have a bad reverberation on their chance of getting back into Germany.

Next day the cops put George and Paul on a plane out for England. Bye bye, Beatles. Don't come back.

The rest of the boys made their own way home. Soon they were all back in Merseyside and looking for work again. Not much richer than when they went out five months earlier, but now they had this great sound. The sound that was to go round the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Snowflakes and fire on the Top Ten

At the end of 1960, Ray McFall, the boss of the Cavern in Mathew Street, was still putting on jazz but was cautiously tuning in to the Liverpool Sound.

I decided to open a Top Ten Club of my own in Soho Street off Islington, a short distance from Lime Street. I knew what I was doing. Those kids had money and needed some place to go. I wanted the Beatles to star there when they came back. I wanted them to make it their musical home.

This was not to be. Like so many of my little schemes.

Bob Wooler was my compère when I opened the joint. It was a long low barn of a place, up a flight of wooden steps. There wasn't much in the way of decor. But it had a rugged charm, I liked to kid myself. It was a success the minute it opened.

Bob really didn't like the Top Ten. He agreed it had a certain atmosphere, but it wasn't one that suited him. Bob is a very nervous character. He was used to Merseyside hard knocks, but these kids were the end. They were so tough they had devised a weapon that was a new gimmick even to me, who thought I knew them all. They showed me one day what they did with their school books.

In playground fights, if a boy went down he was pretty sure he wouldn't get up in one piece. His opponent would, as a matter of course, calmly kick the living daylights out of him, watched by admiring buddies. So the boys invented this weapon. They stitched pieces of steel along the spines of their textbooks, and one blow would put a boy down and out on a stretcher to hospital.

Tough? There must be another word for it.

Business was great. I had a lot of groups playing there. It was the first time these tough tenement kids had ever seen a live

group on stage. I did a huge business in Cokes and the money was rolling in.

Eight days after the opening, the place burned to the ground. An electrical fault had developed in the wiring. Only minutes after the kids had left the place and I had closed down, the fire broke out. I was dead lucky that the fire hadn't started when the kids were all in there dancing and Bob was stoned out of his mind on navy rum. There would have been some deaths for sure.

There was little the fire brigade could do. The Top Ten Club in Soho Street was no more. Opened and closed in just about a week. Sounds like a West End flop story. Bang went my plans for a permanent Beatles' home.

On Christmas Eve I was raking around among the charred timbers and smoke-blackened bricks, bits of guitars and amplifiers, seeing what I could salvage. A steady fall of snow began, quickly coating the burnt remains with a thin blanket of silver. There was a Salvation Army band playing Christmas carols down outside the Empire Theatre on Lime Street. I felt like having a little cry.

Then I saw the Beatles trudging through the snow towards me. They had come to see their new home I had told them about. They knew about the disaster. They had come just the same to see what was left.

'Hello, lads.'

'Hi, Al.'

'Man, this is rough.'

'And this was gonna be our new home.'

'Not now, not any more.'

'What fucking rotten luck, Allan.'

'Yeah, that's the way it goes. We stood around and watched the snowflakes falling on to the ruins of the Top Ten Club.

'Well, Al, no matter what you get next, we'll play there.'

'Yeah, you can be sure of that.'

'Don't worry, we'll be with you, Al.'

'Thanks, boys, thanks a lot.'

We adjourned to the theatrical pub nicknamed 'Ma's' at the back of the Empire. We gloomed into our drinks and talked about the Hamburg days.

They were keen to get back to Hamburg. But what about the police?

'Can you do anything, Al?'

'The police don't like us any more.'

'Because of the fire.'

'And that Koschmider.'

'Can't figure that guy out.'

We agreed that I should try and get them some dates in Liverpool and at the same time sound out how Hamburg felt about them.

They got quite a few dates. They played the reopened Grosvenor Ballroom, Wallasey, with Derry and the Seniors. And on Boxing Day they went out to Litherland Town Hall to do a gig for one of the best-known promoters on Merseyside, Brian Kelly.

The Beatles were not the same boys who went out with me on the van oh so long ago back in August. Their music was raw, almost savage, compulsive, and it knocked the Merseyside kids sideways. They went mad for the Beatles.

Brian Kelly remembers that Boxing Day gig very well indeed. He paid the Beatles eight quid for the night.

When the Beatles got on stage and started playing, there was a mad rush from the back of the hall to the stage. The kids had been hit by Beatlemania. The bouncers on duty on the door thought a riot had broken out and went rushing in to stop the trouble.

Brian Kelly saw what was happening, and during the Beatles' first break of the night he went backstage where they were having a smoke.

'Listen, boys, how about signing up for some more dates for the next couple of months?'

The Beatles had by this time evolved a kind of college boy double-talk which left listeners absolutely bewildered. Now they lapsed into that jargon and at the end Lennon said, 'Okay, sure, it's a deal.'

The Beatles took the whole of Merseyside by storm — that is, the younger end of it. They played in churches and municipal halls all over the area. They were terrific.

Bob Wooler was knocked out by them and became their big disciple.

'Al, they will be very, very famous one day,' he told me. And Bob was so right.

At that time most of the Liverpool groups wore some sort of uniform, mostly mohair suits and slim ties. Not the Beatles. They were still scruffs to look at. Casual as hell. The other groups began to emulate their battered leather jackets, battered boots and shoes and don't-give-a-damn arrogance on stage.

They became the undisputed number one rock'n'roll Beat group on Merseyside during those first few months of 1961. There were ecstatic queues outside any dance hall the Beatles played. The Beatles, the Beatles, the Beatles. The name went round the teenage grapevine. They were an in thing with the kids. They knew it. The promoters knew it. I knew it. But we couldn't grasp, couldn't even dream, that these boys were about to prance out of the wings and take over the big wide screen and dominate the adult world of entertainment.

Oh yes, Bob Wooler and I said they would be very, very big. But that big? In a million years?

A lotta people missed the boat. We saw the storm blowing up and didn't set our sails to match. But you'll get no gripe from me, no sir.

They sound like meeting places for Labour Party conventions, dull and forbidding — Hamilton Hall, Latham Memorial Hall, Blair Hall, the Aintree Institute. These were the places where the Beatles featured before trekking back to Hamburg.

They were eating their hearts out to get back.

'Say, Al, don't forget we wanna go back to dear old Hamburg.'

'That's a town we love, Al.'

'Liverpool's great . . .'

'But Blair Hall ain't the Reeperbahn.'

'I'm feelin' homesick for the Gretel and Alfons, Al . . .'

'Hey Al, how about it, Al? Hey Al, Hamburg, Al . . .'

'Yeah, yeah, okay, I'm doing my best.'

I was too. I knew Peter Eckhorn was yearning to have the boys appear at the Top Ten Club in the Reeperbahn. They liked Peter. I liked Peter. Everyone liked and likes Peter. He's a great guy. Tall, slim, with a wry smile. He looks at you in a humorously calculating way when he listens. Taking it all in. Tossing it about in his mind, looking at all angles. A very wary, shrewd type.

I had to soft-soap the German government to try and get the boys back into Germany. They had left on not exactly first-rate terms with the German police. So I wrote this letter on 1st March, 1961:

The German Consul.
The German Consulate
Church Street
Liverpool

Dear Sir—

On behalf of a group of musicians, names of which are enclosed, I would like to apply for permission for them to obtain work as professional musicians in Hamburg.

They have recently worked in this capacity as musicians in Hamburg for a Mr. Koschmider, 36, Grosse Freiheit, Hamburg 4. This engagement with Mr. Koschmider was unfortunately disastrous as Mr. Koschmider broke the playing times, he did not give them decent accommodation, he was responsible for obtaining work permits but for which I understand he never applied and he was supposed to have paid £10 sterling [my commission due from Bruno] each week into a German Bank but this he had not done.

I think I have made it clear that Mr. Koschmider did not abide by the agreed terms of the contract, he deliberately tried to stop the musicians from working at another club, but was not able to completely stop the musicians from doing so.

He reported them to the police for a minor mishap the musicians committed and as a result of this two of the musicians were requested to leave the country.

I can assure you all the musicians have very good characters and come from first class families and they have never been in trouble with the police in this country.

I have an agency for musicians for which I am registered annually by the local government.

If they are allowed to work in Germany I can assure you that they are working for a good employer and they have a watertight contract.

Yours faithfully,
A. R. Williams

I got a favourable reply from the German consul's office in Liverpool and set about the rest of the necessary paperwork. Since the boys were minors, this included getting written consent from their next of kin. After a lot of hard work I signed contracts with Peter Eckhorn, and the boys toddled off happily to Hamburg and the Top Ten Club.

While at the Top Ten, incidentally, the Beatles made an extended-play record with the resident singer-guitarist, Tony Sheridan. It was called 'My Bonnie' and was released by Polydor.

Gerry and the Pacemakers, another of my groups, were also booked into the Top Ten. All the boys were good friends. A very cosy arrangement.

On this visit to Hamburg Stuart Sutcliffe met a beautiful German girl called Astrid. Night after night she sat as near to the stage as possible at the Top Ten, and during every break she and Stuart would sit holding hands.

Stuart was still painting and drawing and every day he wandered hand in hand with the beautiful blonde Astrid through the alleys and streets of old Hamburg. His oil paintings were quite riveting. A lecturer at the local art college where Stuart had enrolled, Professor Edouardo Paolozzi, was very enthusiastic. He thought that Stuart had a brilliant artistic career ahead of him. But he pointed out that Stuart was attempting too much by working until early morning at the Top Ten and then going to lectures.

So Stuart left the Beatles and dedicated himself to his artistic studies. It was a wise move. Stuart loved the Beatles, loved being a Beatle, but he was no musician. He knew this. The boys had carried him throughout.

He didn't lose contact with his friends. He called in regularly at the Top Ten for a beer and a chat. So it was that Stuart was the bearer of bad news to me.

The Beatles were getting a hundred and fifty pounds a week at the Top Ten. Out of this they were supposed to pay me 10 per cent a week, fifteen pounds. The lads had instructions to pay the money into my Hamburg bank.

Stuart wrote and told me that the Beatles had no intention of paying this commission. He said that the decision had been

handed on to him by John Lennon. The Beatles claimed that they were within their rights because they had procured the Top Ten booking while playing at the Kaiserkeller.

This was not so. If it had not been for my trojan work with the German authorities in Liverpool, they never would have been allowed back in Germany. And who was it scurried round getting the signatures of next of kin to legalise the whole affair?

I was livid, rattled and greatly surprised at this lack of loyalty after all we had been through together. I could see the hand of Lennon in all this.

May I repeat that this book is not a personal hymn of hate where John is concerned. He was the leader and dominant figure among the Beatles, so it is natural that sometimes he comes over looking like the villain of the piece. He was their backbone and their strength, a strange, powerful youth. I have no animosity towards him now and our rift was soon to heal over.

But how could they justify their actions when they had been under contract to me for so long? They were still boys and perhaps they just didn't see their written and moral responsibilities quite clearly.

Seething with wounded heart and indignation, I sat me down and wrote the Beatles the following letter:

20th April, 1961

Dear All,

I am very distressed to hear you are contemplating not paying my commission out of your pay, as we agreed in our Contract for your engagement at the Top Ten Club.

May I remind you, seeing you are all appearing to get more than a little swollen-headed, that you would not even have smelled Hamburg if I had not made the contacts, and by Law it is illegal for any person under contract to make a contract through the first contract. [This was in reference to their claim that they had laid the groundwork for their subsequent appearance at the Top Ten while at the Kaiserkeller.] I would also point out that the only reason you are there is through the work that I did and if you had tried yourselves to play at the Top Ten without a bona fide contract and working through a British Government approved agency you would not be in Germany now.

Remember in your last contract under Koschmider you agreed not to play 30 weeks from terminating that contract. The only reason you managed to get out of that, was again, through myself. So far as you are concerned, he kept the contract.

So you see lads, I'm very annoyed [you can say that again] you should welsh out of your agreed contract. If you decide not to pay I promise that I shall have you out of Germany inside two weeks through several legal ways and don't you think I'm bluffing.

I will also submit a full report of your behaviour to the Agency Members Association, of which I am a full member, and every Agent in England is a member, to protect Agents from Artistes who misbehave and welsh out of agreements. So if you want to play in Liverpool for all the local boys you go straight ahead and welsh on your contract. Don't underestimate my ability to carry out what I have written.

The letter goes on after a bit of local chat about happenings in Liverpool:

My friend who has the Agency in London is bringing Ray Charles over to England in September and they plan to do a tour. I had thought of you going on tour with him, but unless you honour your agreement you can forget it. I will fix it for Rory Storm. This is no sprat, you check with your musical papers.

Look lads, I can do more for you than all the rest in Liverpool put together if I want to. Remember the others are only copying my original idea. In fact I told Ray McFall [at the Cavern] to put on Rock. So I think you are mad to try and make good with the Liverpool crowd who only want you to play for themselves [meaning I wanted the Beatles to think in wider terms than being a purely local group].

I don't want to fall out with you but I can't abide anybody who does not honour their word or bond, and I could have sworn you were all decent lads, that is why I pushed you when nobody wanted to hear you.

Yours sincerely,

Allan

You can see from that letter that I was very upset and disappointed in the Beatles' actions. I think what hurt me most was that the contracts had not only been between business associates but also between longstanding friends who had been through a great deal of hardship together.

This letter marked the beginning of the end of our business association. I don't think I could have acted in any other way. Unknown to me, though, I was saying good-bye to millions of pounds and worldwide success. As I say, everybody can look back in wisdom.

The boys stuck to their guns — or Lennon's guns, whichever way you see it. I didn't, of course, carry out my threats to get them blackballed with other agencies, which was quite within my power. I could also easily have got them out of Germany, as I told them, but that was out of the question. I am not the vindictive or petty-minded type.

I wrote Stuart a few more letters about the naughty Beatles. There was nothing he could do. He wrote back and gave me his personal news.

He and Astrid, both very much in love, were living in a flat on the top floor at 42 Eimsbuttelerstrasse, the interior of which was painted all black. Very kinky.

Stuart was complaining to me about recurring headaches and fits of depression. He spent many sleepless nights literally beating his head against the walls to stop the pain. It was the beginning of the end for the 'Fifth Beatle' — the boy with the James Dean born-to-die image.

He went to doctors in Germany and England but none of them could find the cause of the trouble or do anything for the poor boy. Stuart agreed with me — that the headaches stemmed from the injuries he had received when he was beaten up by a gang of hostile youths outside Litherland Town Hall after a Beatles gig.

Paradoxically, Stuart's work improved immensely in this period, though it took on a sombre, morbid quality. I still have many of his oil paintings.

Round about this time, towards the end of 1961, one Richard Starkey — alias Ringo Starr — had parted company with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes. He was kicking his heels around his

parents' home in Admiral Grove out Dingle way in Liverpool. It seems Ringo fancied country-and-western music and yearned to go and live in the great outdoors.

Ringo always fancied himself on a horse, with big boots and guns. So he wrote to the Houston Chamber of Commerce in Texas and teetered, unknowingly, on the edge of obscurity while waiting for the reply.

The letter came:

Houston Chamber of Commerce, Chartered by the
Republic of Texas, 1840

Tennessee Building. Capital 7-5111.
P.O. Box 2371. Houston 1, Texas.
Oct 24, 1961.

Mr. R. Starkey
10 Admiral Grove
Liverpool 8,
England.

Dear Mr. Starkey,

Thank you for your letter regarding your interest in working in this city.

Attached is a list of employment agencies which you may care to check for possible contacts.

If we can be of further assistance to you, please let us know.

Yours very truly,
(signed)
A. F. Prieto, Manager
World Trade Department.

AFP:bc
Enc.

So how about that? Ringo wanted to be a Texan. Instead he became a Beatle.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Brian – Don't touch 'em with a bargepole

The Beatles were due back in Liverpool from the Top Ten Club. They were coming to do some dates at the Cavern, which was now plugged right in to rock'n'roll and the Big Beat. Before leaving Hamburg, they had made some arrangements to do some dates at the Star Club, owned by Manfred Weissleder, later that year and in 1962.

Their days at the Top Ten had been superbly happy. Mine had been less so because of our rift.

While at the Top Ten they had made a great friend of Rosa, the lavatory attendant. She had a houseboat in the harbour, and often the Beatles would grab a cab with Rosa and spend the night on the boat yarning and strumming their guitars while the moon grew pale over the Hamburg rooftops. She would wake them in the afternoon with their favourite food, cornflakes and milk and a bottle of beer. Those were golden days with Rosa, the toilet attendant.

Meanwhile, Ray McFall was making a fortune. Ringo was dreaming about those big wide-open spaces in Texas, and the Merseyside kids had latched on to the record, 'My Bonnie'. Not because of Tony Sheridan. Tony was brilliant, but it was the Beatles the kids bought the record for.

Bob Wooler, then MC and disc jockey at the Cavern, had the record. He played it incessantly, pushing the Beatles like crazy.

'Now listen, folks, here are the fabulous Beatles, our very own Liverpool boys recorded with Tony Sheridan.'

One day, as we all know, a kid walked into Brian Epstein's record and furniture shop in Whitechapel and asked Brian for the record.

'Never heard of it. The Beatles? Who are these Beatles?'

Brian was a frustrated actor. He had done a course at RADA (the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art), but he had been too

self-conscious for a stage career. He was a homosexual, and was in with a crowd of Liverpool hairdressers who had a pad in Falkner Square.

Brian was a great guy, good hearted, and I considered him a true friend. When he set about to find more information on this group the kids were turned on to, he came to me and I chatted about the Beatles and told him how brilliant they were, but held back on the gory details of how they had let me down. Then he went to see Bob Wooler at the Cavern. Bob raved about the Beatles and told Brian when they were due on at the Cavern next.

Brian turned up and stood at the back of the crowd of kids. He was at once overwhelmed by the Beatles' music and their personalities. He went around saying to everyone, 'Don't you think they have magnetic personalities?'

It was the Beatles as people he went for first. He could feel their electrifying presence more than the superlative qualities of their sound.

It took a homosexual to see the deep response that these four Liverpool scruffs, lounging around on the Cavern stage, turning their backs to their fans, were capable of eliciting. When the Beatles went on stage in that sweatbox surrounded by a warren of fruit warehouses, the kids sat at their feet as though they were adoring some strange gods from another land, another world, another universe. Brian saw the rapture in their eyes. He felt he could almost touch the bond the Beatles created between themselves and the audience.

If he had not been a homosexual, he might not have responded so deeply to them.

He talked to me often about the Beatles. He came round to the Blue Angel night after night. I could see he was hooked on them. Committed. Devastated.

One particular night as he arrived at the front door I let him in and bought him a drink. I could see he wanted to talk. About the Beatles, of course.

I led him over to the grand piano, where we always had a guy called Duggie tinkling away for the older customers who liked to sit well away from the Beat music down below in the cellar. I catered for all tastes at the Blue. By the dim light over the piano I could see Brian was blushing again. He was always blushing.

This was one of his most endearing traits. He was just like a schoolboy.

'Well, come on, Brian, it's the Beatles again, isn't it? I've heard you've been checking on them all over town.'

'That's true, Allan, I have. Now, look, you were the very first to discover them so you must know them very well, better than anyone else.'

'Yeah, Brian, I thought I did. Go on . . .'

'What do you mean, you thought you did? I know you are sore about their contracts . . .'

'So you know . . . I was going to let you find out on your own before I said anything, Brian. It's not for me to go round telling tales.'

'Yes, I found out about that trouble, Allan. But I have decided I want to take them over, manage them, push them as far as I can. I believe in them, I . . .'

He not only blushed, he sweated when he talked about them. He was hypnotised. I had to tell him what had happened between the Beatles and me if he was this serious.

'Well, Brian, be bloody careful. Look what they did to me in Hamburg. They wouldn't pay my commission, a lousy fifteen quid a week. Me, after all I'd done for them. They wouldn't have been anywhere without me.'

I called them a few choice names. Brian winced visibly.

'Please . . . Allan . . .'

I went on: 'They're completely ruthless. They're nice lads, all right, but unpredictable when it comes to contracts. Oh, they're the salt of the fucking earth, Brian. But be careful what you're signing. Make sure it's watertight. For your sake and theirs.'

'Okay, Allan, should I take them over or not? Your honest opinion.'

'My honest opinion, Brian, is this: don't touch them with a fucking bargepole.'

There. It was out. I must have been out of my mind. Still, if Brian had taken my advice he might be alive today. Not too rich. But alive. And the Beatles might have been a big zero. But I doubt that.

My words to Brian echo in my mind to this day. They have a fine ring about them, do they not? 'Don't touch them with a fucking bargepole.'

The Beatles and I had parted company since they refused to pay my commission. They were on their own as far as I was concerned. They could get as many dates at the Cavern as they wanted, enough to keep the wolf from the door. But I had been interested in getting them to a wider audience than just Liverpool. This scheme had fallen through because of their attitude over the commission.

I suppose I could have gone back to the Beatles and said, 'Okay, lads, let's forget the commission, let's start thinking about the future.' I didn't do this. Now here was Brian Epstein asking me what he should do about them.

'Do you still want to be associated with them?' asked Brian.

I didn't think very much about that one. I had the answer pat.

'No thanks, anyone can have them as far as I am concerned.'

There, I'd done it. Cut the mental bonds. They had been under exclusive contract to me. Now I was saying to Brian, and anyone else, to do what the hell they wanted about it. Take the Beatles and good luck. Yes, if you like, I was giving them away.

Duggie on the grand piano was tinkling away at a number called, of all things, 'Destiny'. Could you beat that? And Brian's tongue was hanging out. We talked some more.

'I think I'll take them on,' said Brian. 'They need someone now.'

'That they do, but heed my warning, Brian. Watch they don't try to wriggle out of their contracts like they did with me. I'd hate to see you spend a lot of money and be left high and dry.'

'No, I don't want that.'

I could see Brian was mulling it over in his mind. Should he or should he not? I might have just tipped the scales against the Beatles that night. But we all know I did no such thing — because Brian was already on a collision course with the high and mighty and an early death.

'Look, Brian, they are marvellous kids. They're talented, good-looking, stuffed with personality and zest. They have a great stage presence and I think they are musically brilliant and will get better.

'That's the good part. But they have proved themselves to be completely unpredictable over honouring their agreements. Now you must take all that into consideration.'

'Yes, yes, Allan, you're right, but I feel here' — he tapped his

chest — 'that together the Beatles and I could make something really big. So big that . . .'

He was lost for words to express his blind faith in them.

'They're so magnetic, so magnetic.' This was Brian's word for the Beatles, which he repeated over and over in these early days.

I said, 'Brian, as far as I am concerned, they're all yours. I've finished. And bloody good luck with the Beatles.'

Bloody good luck he did have with the Beatles. They became the New Messiahs of the teenage world.

Brian asked me if I would be available to give him advice.

'Always, Brian. Count on me. Any time.'

He had another drink and left on the run for the Cavern and his Beatles.

In between their dates at the Star Club in Hamburg and popping back to Merseyside, where they dominated the Cavern, the Beatles picked up Ringo.

Ringo had by now dropped the idea of becoming a Texan cowboy. It was just as well, because the Beatles — that is, John, George, Paul and their new boss Brian — decided that Pete Best was out and Ringo was in. Good-bye, Texas. Hello, Hamburg and a million quid. Saved from Texan oblivion by the skin of his Dingle teeth, that boy Richard Starkey. How lucky can you get?

I did some joint promotions with Brian, putting the Beatles on at places like the New Brighton Tower and Southport. But he handled all the business. Not for me, no thanks.

And I barred the Beatles from my Blue Angel Club, which hurt them a great deal socially. All the groups congregated in the club late at night after their gigs. The Beatles felt left out. Good, I thought. Good.

The Beatles tried to put on a brass face and presented themselves at the club door one night. John, George and Paul knocked on the door and I opened it.

They stood there on the doorstep in their black leather gear, great big nervous smiles on their faces.

'Hi, Allan, can we come in?'

'Hello, Allan, how are you?'

'We thought we'd call round and say hello.'

I couldn't believe my eyes and my ears.

'Well, what a fucking nerve,' I exploded. 'You do what you

did in Hamburg and here you are trying to get in my fucking club. You cheeky bastards. Get lost. Fuck off. You'll never come in here so long as I own the place.'

They got the message.

'Okay, Al, okay.'

'You needn't be like that.'

'We can take a fucking hint.'

They turned and trooped off into the night. The fucking nerve of some people, I thought. Inside I felt bloody awful. I loved those boys like younger brothers. But what could I do?

In a way it was a lark to have told the Fab Four to fuck off when in no time at all the world would be falling over its feet to catch their ears, their hearts, their souls. But I couldn't stick to it. Brian pleaded for them to be allowed into the Blue. This was one reason why he took me in on his promotions — he wanted to get the Beatles and me friendly again. (He also wanted to learn the tricks of the trade.)

I couldn't keep up my resentment, so I said okay, the Beatles could come in and bygones would be bygones. And they were.

On the evening of the day that the Beatles played at the Cavern with Ringo replacing Pete Best for the first time, George, Paul and John came along with Brian Epstein to the Blue Angel. We went downstairs to the cellar bar for a drink and a chat.

In the light from the small bar I noticed that George had a black eye. George is the peace-loving type. I didn't say anything about the injury.

After I had poured out the drinks — Scotch and Coke, as usual, for the boys and a large whisky, no Coke, for Brian — George said to me very seriously, 'Allan, just tell me. Who do you think is the best drummer — Pete Best or Ringo Starr?'

I didn't know why George was looking for reassurance from me. There was never any doubt about the respective merits of the two drummers. I said quickly, 'Ringo Starr every time. He's damned good and everyone knows it.'

George turned to Brian smiling. 'There, you see, Brian? What did I tell you? Ringo Starr.'

At the lunchtime session at the Cavern that day when Ringo

sat in for Pete Best, some of the fans had let their loyalties run away with them. One of the kids had taken a swing at George and blacked his eye. They were loyal as hell, those Cavern kids, though they soon took to Ringo.

Another night, not long after Ringo had taken over, Brian came round to the Blue with tears in his eyes. He had a new Bentley Continental, a thing of shining beauty and power.

'Come outside and have a look at this, Allan. Just come and look at what they've done. It's awful. How could they?'

There was a tear on his cheek. Brian took things very, very hard at times.

The terrible thing that Brian wanted me to see was his car parked outside in Seel Street. Somebody had poured acid on to the paintwork. It looked an ugly mess. A wanton, wicked thing to do. We stood there looking at it sadly, Brian pointing to the damage and saying, 'Look at that, and look at that there.'

'But why, Brian, why?'

'Jealousy,' he said. 'Plain unadulterated jealousy.'

'Who is jealous and what for?'

'Jealousy about me and the Beatles. You know, Allan, there are some very bad people about. When you get involved with this end of show business, anything can happen.'

'Ah well, you can always get yourself a new paint job. The people who do things like this can't get a new head, that's for sure.'

My few words cheered him up and we went back in to the Blue for a drink. It was about this time that I started to drink heavily. I haven't stopped yet. I like it.

During one of our joint promotions at the New Brighton Tower Brian got his first taste of how Beatlemania could turn into ugly, bloody violence. He hadn't yet seen this side of show business. This night was to be his baptism. It frightened him badly and made him very wary for the future.

It was the custom at New Brighton Tower not only to have bouncers on the doors, but all the way up the stairway to the ballroom as well. A squad of bouncers on the doors were busy repelling the hordes of youngsters who were trying to gate-crash without tickets. The kids turned nasty when they couldn't get in and fighting broke out.

I was helping the bouncers push back the invaders. Suddenly the kids started to throw rocks and house bricks.

I shouted to the bouncers, 'Quick, boys, get those dustbin lids.'

There was a row of dustbins outside and we quickly grabbed the lids and shielded ourselves with them from the hail of rocks. Just like Romans and ancient Britons.

The dustbin lids were very effective but the situation was still very dangerous. The gate-crashers, those little blighters, would just not go away. They breed them rough and tough over on the other side of the Mersey. I think they resent us Liverpudlians.

Brian heard about the kerfuffle on the door and came to see for himself. He arrived just in time to see two powerful bouncers working one boy over with their truncheons. Brian couldn't stand this. He grabbed one of the bouncers and squealed in his high-pitched voice, 'Stop it, you rotten beasts. Stop that this instant. Leave that poor boy alone, you rotters.'

He sounded just like one of those little sneaks in *Tom Brown's Schooldays.*

The bouncers couldn't believe their cauliflower ears. Here was one of the bosses sticking up for the enemy. What Brian did not know was that only a second earlier one of the 'poor boys' had knocked out a bouncer with a brick. The bouncer was so severely injured he was rushed to hospital. So Brian's intervention on behalf of the juvenile guerrillas was not appreciated.

One of the bouncers left off bashing the kid long enough to grab Brian, punch him and shout, 'Piss off, you fucking old fruit.'

Brian, not badly hurt by the blow, turned tail and fled back into the ballroom, whereupon the bouncer resumed helping his mate to beat the living daylights out of the youthful would-be gate-crasher. Who by this time was offering no arguments.

Happy days.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Watching a dead man in this bowling alley

Early in 1962 the Beatles came over to Liverpool from their latest appearance at the Star Club in Hamburg. Stuart Sutcliffe came with them and I met them all at a bowling alley in the city centre. The beautiful Astrid was with Stuart and they were obviously very much in love.

I was shocked and horrified at Stuart's physical condition. I took him on one side and said, 'Look here, Stuart, you don't look too good. You look in very bad shape, in fact. What is going on?'

'I know, Allan, I know. It's these bloody awful headaches. They never seem to let up. But there's nothing I can do about it. I've just seen the doctors here in Britain. They can't help. Like the doctors in Germany, they say there's nothing they can find wrong.'

He looked to me to be on death's door. Even so, he refused to talk any more about himself. He was simply bubbling over about the way the Beatles' career was shaping up. He had no regrets about giving up his place with them, though. He knew he would never have been a guitar player in a million years.

He started a game of bowls with the Beatles. I said to the Beatles quietly, 'What's to be done about Stuart? He looks as though he's dying.'

'What can we do?'

'The doctors can't find anything wrong.'

'He's worried stiff but can't do much about it.'

'Poor old Stuart.'

We watched him sending his ball down the alley. We were watching a dead man.

Stuart and Astrid and the Beatles returned to Hamburg. A couple of weeks later I received a telegram from Astrid saying simply, 'My Stuart is dead.'

The headaches had got worse and he had been put in an ambulance to be rushed to hospital. He died of a cerebral haemorrhage on the way. The date was 10th April, 1962.

The 'Fifth Beatle' was dead at the age of twenty-one. A short brief existence. He never even lived to see the Beatles shoot to fame. He would have liked that. He would not have been envious or bitter that he was not still with them.

I had to break the news to Stuart's mother Millie, who broke down and said, 'Oh no, not my poor wee Stuart. Stuart, gone, gone, gone.' She wept on my shoulder. I cried with her.

Mrs. Sutcliffe flew to Hamburg with Brian Epstein, who was going out to see the Beatles. The Beatles met them on the tarmac. They were all in tears when they welcomed the dead boy's mother.

The Beatles did not attend the funeral at Huyton Cemetery in Liverpool. They didn't even send a bunch of flowers to the boy who had loved them so much. The Beatles are not the types to go to funerals. But they felt Stuart's loss terribly.

Astrid, who had often told me, 'Stuart is my whole life', was distraught. She and Millie Sutcliffe had never exactly had a great affection for each other. On one occasion, while on a visit from Hamburg, Stuart and Astrid had left Mrs. Sutcliffe's home where they had been staying, and come knocking on my door. I put them up. Astrid told me that she and Mrs. Sutcliffe could not get on together, so she and Stuart had walked out on her. Now the two women couldn't even patch up their differences for the funeral. Astrid stayed with John Lennon's wife Cynthia on the Wirral.

Astrid was very upset when she saw Mrs. Sutcliffe lean over and kiss her dead son's face while he was lying in his coffin.

'I thought that was terrible,' she said.

After the funeral I thought of that boy who went out working with garbage men so he could meet 'the real people'. The boy who had a spectacular career ahead of him as an artist.

I took my car and drove around Liverpool drinking too much. In the early morning I found myself at Blundellsands, where I had spent many happy hours singing round the beach fires with Stuart and the rest. I listened to the foghorn, the Bootle Bull out in the Crosby Channel, heard the mournful

cries of the ship's buzzers and fell asleep before a small fire.

I didn't waken till first light. A dog was licking my face. Must have thought I was dead.

Driving back to Liverpool, I saw the sun suddenly burst through the clouds.

Since his death, Stuart has become something of a cult figure among the kids of Liverpool, where he is regarded in the same light as James Dean.

The *Liverpool Daily Post* wrote for Stuart's death:

> At fifteen he gained his GCE at Prescot Grammar School; at sixteen he was a student at Liverpool College of Art; at seventeen he became bass guitarist of the Beatles; two and a half years later he left the Beatles to study at Hamburg College of Art, where he showed rare promise; ten months later he died of a cerebral haemorrhage.
>
> This was the tragically short lived career of Stuart Sutcliffe, who at nineteen had a picture accepted for the John Moores exhibition — a painting which was subsequently bought by Mr. John Moores himself.
>
> But although he has gone, his work is by no means forgotten . . .
>
> Sutcliffe's earlier Liverpool work is reminiscent in style of John Bratby. For a year (while with the Beatles) he did no painting at all.
>
> Then when he took up the paint brush again while playing with the Beatles in Hamburg he began to produce abstracts of a warm brooding intensity.
>
> By day he studied at the Hamburg College, by night he played into the early hours of the morning with the Beatles at Hamburg night clubs.
>
> Then his lecturer Professor Edouardo Paolozzi warned him he was doing too much, advised him to leave the Beatles and concentrate on painting.
>
> He did. But he was already a sick man, his work interrupted by periods of illness. He had only ten months to live. His forthcoming posthumous exhibition at Liverpool Bluecoat Chambers is largely the result of his mother, an ex-school teacher married to a ship's engineer, Mr. Charles

Sutcliffe, at present with Lamport and Holt's cargo vessel *Sheridan* on the South America–New York run.

Bill Harry, founder and owner of the pop paper *Mersey Beat* and now a big-time show biz PR man in London, wrote in his paper:

> I still remember Stu Sutcliffe, intense, complex, talented . . . a great loss not to music but art.
>
> He loved the Beatles and when he sold a painting and bought a guitar and joined the band he was involved in the happiest moments of his short life.
>
> He contributed a great deal to the Beatles, not as a musician but as a person.
>
> He fought an inner battle because of his conflicting love for music and art, and art won . . . Many leading critics were astonished at his work.
>
> For one so young he had the potential to become one of the world's greatest painters. His death was a blow to many . . . his mother Millie . . . apart from memories she has many of Stuart's paintings. I have some myself which I shall never part with.

On the occasion of a display of Stuart's 1961 and 1962 Hamburg work at the Neptune Theatre Gallery in Liverpool in 1969, art expert Ivor Jones wrote:

> Between Stuart's birth in Edinburgh on 23rd June, 1940, and his death in Hamburg on 10th April, 1962, there were crowded the formative years of childhood and adolescence, his education at Prescot Grammar School and the Liverpool College of Art, his rejection and disillusionment, his brief period with the Silver Beatles, and his final year of intensive creative activity at the State High School in Hamburg.
>
> One would not wish to discount the influences brought to bear on him from his birth until 1961 — the devotion of his mother whose belief in her son's work has never wavered, his early school and his apprenticeship of the College of Art; and his Beatles period, particularly his friendship with John Lennon.

It was, however, at the State High in Hamburg that he found himself. There he enrolled in 1961 to study under Edouardo Paolozzi, the visiting professor who accepted Stuart into his 'Master Class'. Music began to take a back seat as he devoted himself more and more to his art, working feverishly in his dramatic 'black studio' in the attic of a house lived in by the Kircherr family, to whose photographer daughter Astrid he bacame engaged.

It was a period of triumph over desperation, of obsession, of a 'burning out', of giving his soul to his work.

The fact that nearly all the 1964 one-man exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery was devoted to his Hamburg work is in itself significant, for it was there that he reached the turning point of his brief life — a Renaissance that was too short lived.

The work shown at this exhibition is but a fraction of his immense Hamburg output and looking through it all was to the writer a very moving experience.

The Walker Exhibition was a fitting tribute to a very 'perceptive and sensitive person'. It was not a gimmick designed to bring coach loads of teenagers from far and wide to gaze at the work of an ex-Beatle.

The organising Committee, John Willett, Nicholas Horsfield and John Jacob, are men of too high an integrity to stoop to gimmickry.

Now at the Neptune Theatre, seven years after Stuart's death, the organisers of this exhibition, moved by the same motives and belief in his work, are intent on giving Stuart Sutcliffe at least some of the recognition he so richly deserves.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Ringo, the races and a skinful of brandy

On 5th October, 1962, the Beatles released 'Love Me Do' and it went into the charts. The Beatles were about to leap on to the wide-screen of world fame.

About this time Brian Epstein was worried about the publicity side of the business. He had little knowledge of this sphere. He knew my friend William Marshall, who was then Liverpool correspondent for the *Daily Mirror*. He contacted Bill and a photographer friend. Bill was keen to do the work for Brian and the Beatles; indeed, Paul McCartney had already approached him about publicity for the group. But the photographer was over-eager about money. What should have been a friendly sounding-out chat about Bill handling the Beatles' publicity broke up in some disarray.

The meeting with Bill and Brian and the photographer took place in the old St. George Restaurant on Lime Street, right next door to the Liverpool Press Club where Bill did most of his newspaper work.

Brian was very nervous and drank a lot of Scotch. He also had a bad dose of 'flu.

'I'd like you to handle the Beatles' publicity,' he told Bill.

Bill was attempting to come to grips with the situation but the photographer kept butting in with words like, 'Well, it will cost you twenty quid to start with.'

Bill found this highly embarrassing, and he and Brian got nowhere. After the abortive meeting Bill went back to the Press Club to finish writing a murder case he had just covered at the Assize Court in St. George's Hall.

Next day he received a phone call from Brian. Would Bill come round and see him in his office in Whitechapel?

Bill couldn't. He was busy with his *Mirror* work.

Says Bill, 'I've regretted it ever since.' He is now tucked away

in a suburb of London, buried but not entirely forgotten by his many friends.

He had a great name for a publicity firm — Publicity Ink. A great name, a great pity. That's some more stuff for someone's Ho Hum file.

On 1st August, 1963, Bill and I and a guy who shall be nameless put on the biggest open-air Beat show the world had then seen. We hired Stanley Stadium, an open-air venue in Liverpool, and put on Billy J. Kramer, Mike Sarne, John Leyton, the Searchers, The Big Three, Alexis Korner's Blues Inc, The Hollies, Pete McLaine and the Clan, Lee Curtis, Johnny Sandon and Remo 4, The Mojos, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Chris Nava Combo, Beryl Marsden, Mersey Beats, Earl Preston, Undertakers, Sonny Webb, Escorts, Easy Beats and the Panthers, Bob Wooler was compère.

It was a floperoo. The weather was bad and only ten thousand people turned up. We needed a hell of a lot more than that to break even.

Brian Epstein said I couldn't have the Beatles because they were appearing the same day at Southport. And truth to tell they were now priced right out of my range

Brian arrived at the stadium and looked around at the layout. We had sideshows, fun fairs, parades, bars and amplifiers that could be heard miles away.

'By God, Allan, this is the way to do things. This is really big.' His eyes shone at the financial potential and the spectacular flavour of it all.

On my application to the magistrates for the licence to run the show the lawyer told them:

> Mr. Williams is impresario and promoter of such events. He was originally the person who helped start off the Beatles on their career.
>
> He did, in fact, start the Mersey Sound which is now the leading type of music in the country. Liverpool has become the Mecca for modern music and it is intended to further this phenomenon by this show which in size and quality will be the biggest show of its type ever staged in Europe.

It might have furthered the music. It did nothing for my bank account. We shoulda stayed in bed.

The Beatles by this time were big, big, big. I saw quite a lot of the boys and a heck of a lot of Ringo. We met often to go and have a drink at a club called The Joker's. The Joker was the owner, a black man, very fat and very, very dangerous. He was always surrounded by a bunch of hoods ready to do his bidding. He's dead now so I think it's safe to talk.

The Joker was so black he was almost purple. He'd sit there by a big roaring fire in the bar-room, king of his own little castle, holding forth to the drunks, dope pushers, seamen, whalers, pimps and whores. At the end of every sentence he would turn to his minders and say, 'Is that right, boys?'

They always chorused back dead on cue. 'That's right, boss.'

It was a real tough place and Ringo and I went there quite a lot because we liked the atmosphere, the amazing people who frequented it. One night we saw a Norwegian seaman, stoned out of his mind, stagger up to the counter and hold out a handful of English pound notes to pay for a drink. The big fat barmaid was known to every sailor between Liverpool and Hong Kong. When this guy got up to the bar, swaying around in his big sea boots, she grabbed all the money out of his calloused fist. While Ringo and I watched bug-eyed at the felony, she gave the guy his drink. Then she gave him his 'change'. The 'change' was a wad of trading stamps.

'Christ,' said Ringo, 'did you see that, Allan?'

'Did I? What a rotten old bag she is.'

Ringo and I hung around for a little longer watching the scene. The seaman came back for another drink. He pulled the trading stamps out of his pocket and plonked them on the bar. He croaked a request for a large rum, pointing to the bottle and gabbling in Norwegian.

The barmaid took one look at the soggy mess of trading stamps soaking up the spilt booze on the bar and screamed at the poor guy, 'Why, you twisting bastard, what's all this? You don't get any drinks with this fucking crap. These are trading stamps. Fuck off, ya bum.'

So you see it was a place with a very special charm. Ringo and I loved it.

I put a couple of groups on there but word soon got around among the boys that it was a rough place for musicians.

There was a small crummy dance floor attached to the club and most of the girls who went there were either full-time on the game or housewives out to make a fast buck for buying groceries. When fighting broke out, which was often, The Joker — who enjoyed seeing the blood flow as long as it wasn't his own — ordered all doors to be locked. Then he'd settle back to watch the fun, protected by his gang of torpedoes. After the smoke of battle had cleared, the doors were opened and the bodies pitched out into the night. Fun, fun, fun days.

This was okay for the drunken seamen and whores, who fought like cats and dogs and seemed to like it. But the groups were there to play their kind of music. When all the doors were locked by order of The Joker, they would be locked in as well. This could be a very scary business.

I asked The Joker to build a special escape door near the main entrance so my boys could scuttle out at the first sign of trouble. The Joker refused and so I decided not to supply any more groups.

One night after Ringo and I had taken on a skinful of brandy we decided to move from The Joker's to another place called The Greek Club in Princess Avenue.

'I'll race you there,' I challenged Ringo.

'Okay,' said Ringo, 'you're on for a fiver.'

Ringo was being chauffeured around in a hired car. We both ran out into the night and Ringo shouted to his chauffeur, 'Move over, we've got a bet on.'

I scrambled into my Jag and the race was on.

We tore through the darkened streets doing speeds up to ninety. I was so pissed I lost the way. In my own neighbourhood. That's how pissed I was.

I pulled up at a strange house, which in my demented state I took to be the Greek Club. There was no reply to my knock on the front door. I staggered into some bushes in the pathway. They felt lovely and soft so I lay down on them, curled up like a little squirrel, and dozed off to sleep.

I slept like a log until the early morning. Raindrops were pattering on my face and early morning types going to work were pointing to the strange object curled up in the bushes.

Ringo told me that he spent half the night touring the area looking for me. They found my car but not me, out to the world in the bushes.

'You must be crazy, Allan, going to sleep in a bloody tree,' cracked Ringo.

'Yeah, I think maybe you're right.' I know Ringo's right.

There was another night I'll never forget when The Joker was in a very nasty mood. I ran out of drinking money and lurched over to The Joker by the fireside. I asked him to lend me a few quid till I saw him again. He got very angry for no apparent reason.

'I no lend you fucking money. You fuck off,' he bawled.

I called him a cunt by way of reply and he screamed, 'You no call me a cunt.'

His minders crowded round me and I thought I was in for a hard time. But suddenly two guys who had been drinking at the bar came over to us. They were both built like small houses. One of them had a very pronounced squint. He might have looked funny if he had not been so menacing.

'Leave off, you fellers,' they warned the torpedoes who were threatening me. The torpedoes fell back. It seemed the two strangers were well known and highly respected in The Joker's.

Then one of them told his mate, 'Go fetch the suitcase.'

In a couple of minutes the bloke came back into the bar with a black leather suitcase and plonked it on the bar. They opened it up and my eyes nearly popped out of my head. It was packed with banknotes — tenners, fivers and one-ers. There must have been thousands there.

The feller with the squint gave me ten quid and said, 'Pay me back when you can.' I didn't know him from Adam and there he was lobbing out ten quid to me.

Rory Storm, who had been such a backbone of the Beat movement, had fallen on hard times. One of the casualties of the scene.

His group broke up, and he took some sort of therapy which rid him of his stammer. This enabled him to get jobs on the Continent as a disc jockey, and very good at it he was, too. But while he was away working, his father died.

Rory absolutely adored his father and he was broken up. He

flew back to Liverpool and stood on the tarmac crying and saying, 'No, no, not my dad.'

He never recovered from his father's death. His stammer returned, and Rory, who had always been such an outgoing type, became something of a recluse at the house he and his mother shared — 'Stormsville' — in the Broadgreen area of Liverpool.

One night Bill Harry, founder of *Mersey Beat*, and I were driving past 'Stormsville'. We had been talking about Rory disappearing from the scene, so when we saw a light on in what we knew to be his bedroom window we knocked on the front door, hoping to get a word with our old mate.

Rory's mother came to the door. She told us Rory was not at home. I found out later that he had been, but at that time anyone knocking at 'Stormsville' got the same rejection. Both Rory and his mother had withdrawn from the world. Very sad.

Not long afterwards, in September 1972, both Rory and his mother were found dead in their beds. They had died from barbiturate and alcoholic poisoning. Two empty whisky bottles were found in the house of death.

Rory had been very proud of his leg tremble when he was a pop singer. He could vibrate his left knee in such a way that the girls used to have orgasms simply watching. Now he is dead.

In death he got the biggest headlines ever. He would have loved that.

Rory had been very disappointed that he had not reached the big time like the Beatles. He couldn't accept the fact that he had declined while they had shot up.

'What went wrong, Allan?' he said to me when his group broke up.

I couldn't tell him. Luck, fate, call it what you will. Some go up, some go down. That's life.

He couldn't accept that philosophy.

Rory's sister Iris, wife of pop singer Shane Fenton (now called Alvin Stardust and way up in the charts at the time of writing), told the inquest that her mother had changed from 'a happy, fabulous woman into a zombie' after her husband died.

Her mother, she said, had always been a 'a comedienne':

> She was a fabulous person, just great. She was very, very

happy. We were an extremely close and very involved family with my mum and dad never going out.

We preferred to be involved with ourselves. When my dad died, she changed completely and became practically a zombie and she even lost interest in children.

My brother was a character right from the very beginning and he started with the Beat scene in Liverpool. I think anyone who ever saw him must have thought he was good.

He was called Mr. Showmanship. Everything he did was for show, but he also was, in my opinion, lazy, because he could have been something.

George Harrison once tried to get into Rory's group but they wouldn't let him because he was only twelve.

The verdict on both was suicide while their minds were disturbed.

The *Liverpool Echo* headline screamed 'Liverpool Pop Star Dead'. Rory would have liked the size of the type.

I asked Ringo why he didn't go to Rory's funeral, him being an old friend.

'I wasn't at his birth either, was I?' said Ringo. Right on, Ringo.

Rory was thirty-three when he died.

A slip of a girl with red hair and buck teeth started coming round to the Jacaranda to see her friend, a girl called Terry who knocked around with Adrian Barber of Cass and the Casanovas. Her name was Cilla White. Soon to be Cilla Black, a very, very big star indeed in Britain.

When she got the chance Cilla got up and sang a few songs with the groups in the Jac and in the basement at the Blue Angel. I thought she was great. Sent a tingle down my spine when she sang.

John Rubin, the leader of a group who often played at the Blue, used to tell her to go away. He didn't want her singing and spoiling the group's sound. You gotta laugh.

When she wasn't singing for nothing, Cilla sat in a corner at the Blue holding hands silently with her husband-to-be Bobby Willis.

One night I listened to Cilla and I said, 'How would you like it if I got Brian Epstein to come round tomorrow and listen to

you sing a few songs? You never know what might happen.'

Brian was now the biggest manager in show business. The Beatles were supreme.

'Oooooh, Allan, d'yer really mean it, our kid?' gushed Cilla in that heavy Scotland Road Liverpool accent.

'Sure I do. I think you're great. Just hold on to your hat. And sing your best when he comes round.'

I rang Brian. Sure he'd be glad to listen. What? A woman singer? Not quite his cup of tea, but he had nothing to lose. Eight o'clock? Righto, Allan, he'd be there.

When Cilla got up to sing that night Brian and I were sitting at the back of the cellar. He was completely enchanted with Cilla's voice and within days he had signed her up and she went on tour with the Beatles. She was a big star in no time.

Cilla had been working as a hat check girl at the Cavern and the story goes she was discovered there. Not so. I have given the correct story.

Stars? I was surrounded by them. Pity I didn't hang on to a couple.

At the end of 1961 King Size Taylor — Ted Taylor of King Size Taylor and the Dominoes — set up a tape recorder in the Star Club while the Beatles were on stage. He and Adrian Barber asked the Beatles if they objected to Ted getting their sound down on tape.

'Okay, Ted, just get the beer in.'

So Ted bought the Beatles a few bottles of beer and set his recorder going. During three or four sessions over Christmas and New Year Ted recorded about three hours of the Beatles' music.

He went back to Liverpool and handed the tapes over to a recording engineer with a view to getting them edited and put on the market. Nothing came of it, however, and the recording engineer moved from his premises in Hackins Hey, Liverpool. The offices became derelict and were deserted for several years. By a million-to-one chance I bumped into this recording guy in 1972 and he told me that the tapes might still be in the derelict office. So this guy and King Size Taylor met for a drink one Sunday lunchtime and then got into the office. There, beneath a pile of rubble on the floor of the office, were the Beatles' Hamburg tapes.

I am now trying to get the tapes released and I have been having talks with George and Ringo to that end. I believe there is enough material there for two albums. This would mean they are worth about ten million quid. I am living in hopes.

There has been a lot of publicity about the tapes, written by my pal Bill Marshall, in the *Daily Mirror*. This was followed up by the musical trade papers.

On the tapes you can hear Lennon bawling for his girl friend at the time, Bettina — a barmaid at the Star Club. Lennon also tells the Germans in his own inimitable way, 'This number is a cha cha cha and it is dedicated to Adolf Hitler — "Till There Was You".'

They sing 'Hippy Hippy Shake', 'Roll Over Beethoven', 'Twist and Shout', 'A Taste of Honey' — all good stuff. Wishing the Germans a Merry Christmas, Lennon shouts, 'Christmas comes but once a year and when it does it brings good cheer. Piss off.'

Another number they do is called 'Shimmy Shimmy', but it comes out on the tapes as 'Shitty Shitty'. And 'Your Feet's Too Big' comes out as 'Your Feet's Too Fucking Big'. All good clean stuff. Knockabout humour, you might say.

Anyone wanna buy some vintage Beatles?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

'Rubies my arse.' 'So give 'em back,' said George

Recently, I had a meeting with Ringo and George at the Apple headquarters. I walked in, carrying a carrier-bag full of my tipple, a dozen bottles of special strong beer. George and Ringo were surrounded by a dozen very expensive and high-powered international lawyers.

What a piquant sight, I thought, as I watched the two Liverpool lads handling the situation. I thought back to the early days when they would have curled up in the presence of a small-town lawyer. Here they were, world-famous names, rich, wheeling and dealing in millions.

After the lawyers had gone, I put my beer in George's fridge and we sat down to have a natter — George, Ringo and me. I told them about the Hamburg tapes and the conversation then became general. George was drinking wine and Ringo was on Scotch, while I kept nipping over to the fridge for another bottle of strong beer.

Ringo said he would like a copy of the Hamburg tapes. So I said, 'Let's see the colour of your money, then, Ringo.'

Ringo said, 'I know Ted Taylor well, I'll ring him and he'll give me one.'

'Come on,' I said, well pissed, 'make with the money. Give me a few thousand and you can release the tapes on record. And we'll all make money.'

'I can't give you any money, Allan,' said Ringo.

'Ah, you always were a tight-arsed cunt, Ringo. You haven't changed much. If at all.'

I don't think Ringo liked that.

George broke in: 'Look, Allan, we're broke. This little meeting with those lawyers today will set us back thirty thousand quid for their fees alone.'

I said, 'What's that to you and Ringo, George? What about all the fucking bread you two have made over the years? Don't give me that shit, George. Don't forget what I did for you. I remember you boys when you were begging bacon butties in the Jac.'

But George insisted, 'Believe it or not, we are more or less broke. Groups like David Bowie and Gary Glitter — they're picking up more than we ever did. Brian made a lot of business mistakes and they're learning from our bad luck. Brian was good to us and for us but he wasn't all that good when it came to making a business deal.

'Allan, what happens is this. All the money we make comes pouring back into this company and right into the purses of the bloody tax people. So much so that you know that Bangladesh concert I did for the refugees, Allan? Well, I have just had to write a million-pound cheque right over to the British Government.

'I phoned up Tony Barber, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I said, "Look, what about this Bangladesh concert? We're doing this for charity, giving our services, and you are taking all this money out of it. You're taking more than the refugees."

'But Barber wouldn't budge. The British Government made more money out of the bloody Bangladesh concert than the bloody Bangladesh people got.'

I had a mental flashback to the old days in the Jacaranda in Slater Street when the Beatles had arguments about whether or not they could afford jam on their toast. And I could have been right there with them writing million-pound cheques for the British Government. Ah me. I reached into the fridge for another strong ale.

'Jeeeesus Christ, George,' I said with feeling. 'Jeeeesus H. Christ. A million fucking quid. You poor bastard. You're bloody lucky to have a million. All I'm asking for is a measly five thousand quid for a tape which will make us all millions.'

'Look, Allan,' said George, 'I would love to give you five thousand quid right now, but people don't believe we haven't got it. It's all tied up, our bloody money.'

I was very disappointed. I had bowled in to meet George and Ringo with the Hamburg tapes and I had told my wife Beryl to expect me back in Liverpool that night with a big fat cheque for

five or ten thousand quid as a down payment on the tapes.

'It's a bit fucking off,' I said. 'It's my wife's birthday tomorrow and I was hoping to go back and celebrate with a lot of money at my disposal. There are so many fucking people who've got money out of you and here's me who started you off ... you wouldn't have had a tosser if I hadn't taken you to Hamburg all those years ago ...'

George butted in. 'Come off it, Allan. Where does a thing like that end? You just can't go on like that throughout your life giving handouts to all and sundry because they knew you and did something for you a long time ago. If I hadn't been born, where would I be? You can stretch it out for ever. But I must admit you did a lot for us. If I had five or ten thousand, I'd give it to you now.'

I said, 'Okay, George, write me a fucking cheque this very minute and show me you mean it for old time's sake. Christ, how could that make any dent in a Beatle's fucking millions? Come on, divvy up.'

I was well into the last of the strong beers by now.

'No, no, Allan,' said George. 'I don't have a cheque book on me.'

'Christ,' I said, 'that's a crafty game, George.'

George flicked back the long black hair from his depraved-Christ features and said, 'Here you are, Allan, hold out your fucking hands.'

I stuck out my hands, wondering what was coming next. George reached into his pocket and pulled out something that rattled and made a crunching noise, like rubbing cornflakes together. I thought it was some sort of joke and made to pull my hands away.

'No, no, come on, Allan,' said George, his face serious. 'I want to give you something for the early days when we were together.'

So I stuck my hands out again and in a flashing stream he poured some small bright stones into my hands.

'Here, George,' I said, 'what the fuck are these things? They look like fucking burnt peanuts.' But I could see they were reflecting the light.

'They're fucking rubies,' said George. 'Uncut rubies. Count them. There should be sixteen. Go on, count them, Allan.'

'Rubies, my arse,' I said. 'You're fucking having me on, George. You're taking the piss. Isn't he, Ringo?'

Ringo said, 'No, he's not, Allan. I know they're uncut rubies. I knew he had them on him. Go on, take a closer look, Allan. Don't be a cunt all your life.'

George made a gesture to grab the rubies out of my hands. My little fingers closed around them quickly, firmly.

'Balls to you, Allan, give 'em back then.'

Well, I wouldn't know rubies from rock cakes. But that's what they were. Rubies, I mean. Not rock cakes. I gave them to my wife Beryl as a birthday present. So I didn't go back to Liverpool exactly empty-handed. That was a nice thing for George to do.

George also gave me a note for Beryl, whom he knows well, of course. It read: 'Dear Beryl, Happy birthday — (give Allan a kick) — God bless. George H and Ringo S.'

When I staggered out of Apple, feeling little pain, George was telling one of the staff, 'We should have recorded this chat with Allan Williams tonight. It's ages since anyone dared to talk to us like that, I think it did us a lot of good. Two years ago we would no doubt have had him thrown out.'

I've always called a spade a spade. More so than ever these days. It sometimes gets me in no end of trouble.

CONCLUSION

Colder round my soul

And so . . .

The Blue Angel is no longer in my possession. Likewise the Jac. My business ventures haven't gone too well and I have struck a bad patch.

There were some marvellous nights in the old Blue Angel. Freddie Starr, the big-time comedian, and me and Bill Marshall used to hold mock bullfights there, using a chair for bull's horns. This was a rough game played the right way, and many's the time that Freddie, me and Bill have had to have our ribs strapped up at the hospital.

Not long ago Bill took on a real bull and damaged his spine. He got his injuries protecting me in Spain. The bull had knocked me down and the situation didn't look good. Bill ran in with the cape and attracted the animal away, and I ran for cover.

Poor old Bill. The bull hit him like an express train and he was tossed over its head. He landed, stunned, on its back, and the bull galloped with him around the ring and then threw him off.

That guy must be made out of old boots. He was swimming the next day.

A few days ago I went back to Hamburg to walk around the Reeperbahn on a kind of sentimental journey. I took with me an antique wood-carving of a golden angel. I am stripping the interiors of derelict churches in Liverpool to make an honest buck, and I thought I could sell this golden angel for a few marks.

I lost my coat. It was a freezing day and I found myself wandering around Hamburg, shivering with the cold and hugging this golden angel to my breast. As I was walking down the Reeperbahn, a guy I knew from the old days in Hamburg ran up to me and said, 'Hey, it's Allan Williams, isn't it?'

Yeah, I said, what was left of him.

'What happened to you and the Beatles?'

The wind seemed to blow colder round my soul. I could have cried, hugging my golden angel to my frozen body. But I'm not really the crying kind.

Maybe tomorrow.

But not today.

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all the best.

John Lennon
oct 75

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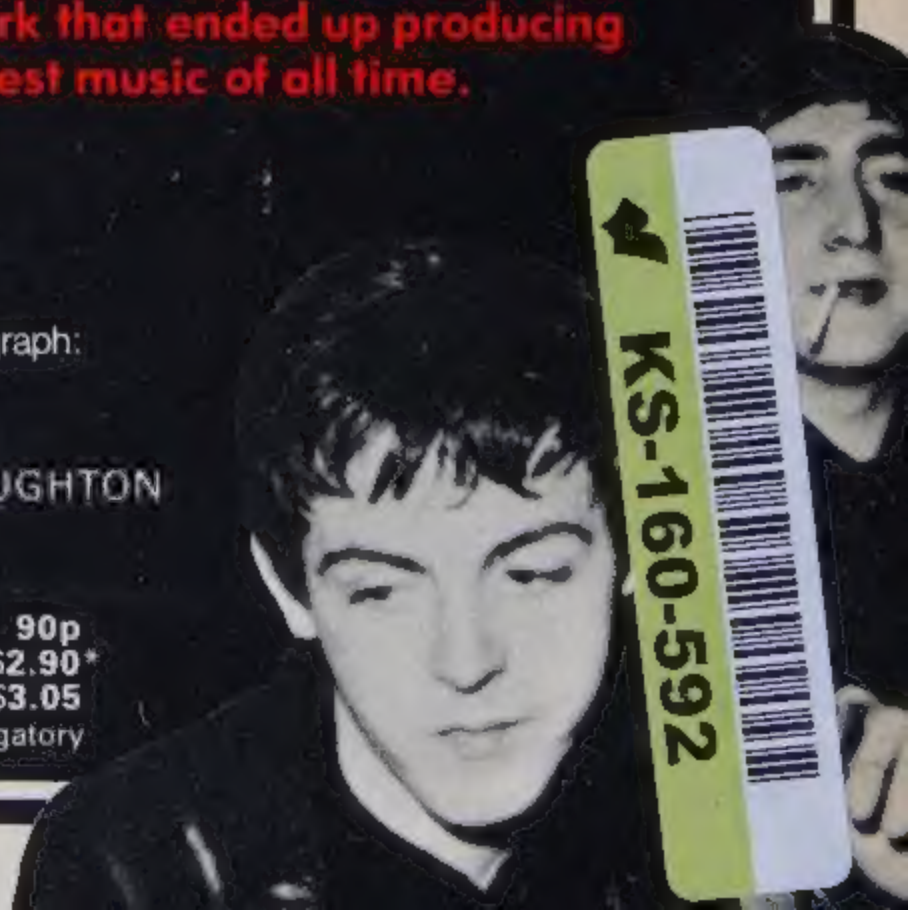

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